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SOME DICKENS WOMEN

By EDWIN CHARLES
Author of "Keys to the Drood Mystery"

With a Foreword
By G. K. CHESTERTON



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To my friend —
MISS MARY ANDERSON
(MADAME DE NAVARRO)
True noble woman, great artist
and Dickens lover.

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FOREWORD

There is, as everyone knows or ought to know, a thing called the Dickens Fellowship, a body whose buoyant vitality was once sufficient even to support the incubus of myself as a president; but in a larger and looser but not less real sense there is everywhere and in every way a thing to be called the fellowship of Dickens. The aptness of the term does not depend entirely on the conviviality or camaraderie often described by Dickens when he is most Dickensian. It is something in the nature of the literary methods and literary merits of Dickens, in dealing with this or any other subject. Dickens's characters are not always passing the bowl, but there is a sense in which Dickens's readers are always passing on the book; Mr Pickwick was not always drinking punch, but several people at once manage to dip together into Pickwick, as they dip together into a punch-bowl. The pleasure of his work at its best, which generally means at its funniest, is of the sort that permits a number of very different people to join in the fun. His work is work to be shared; there are friendships almost founded upon Dickens; and such friends will sit up all night together, each elaborately reciting the passage that the other knows by heart. This quality stands for something which is none the less subtle for being universal; the sort of thing about which it is easy to offer trite explanations and very hard to offer true ones; it is as easy to confuse communion with communism as it is to confuse sentiment with sentimentalism. It is certainly not mere maudlin amiability; on the contrary it is an eminently masculine pleasure, and in that sense an impersonal pleasure. It is essential that the two Dickensians should be thinking about Dickens and not about each other. Yet it does generally found and fortify

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them unconsciously in a lasting friendship with each other. It is certainly not the mere fact of literary excellence on the one hand or of literary popularity on the other. There is many a book that has been read by ten thousand people that could not be read aloud to ten people. There is many a literary masterpiece that a million men have enjoyed, but every man has enjoyed alone. Whatever be the reason, those who like Dickens like talking about Dickens and like the people who will talk about him.

I find myself associated with Mr Edwin Charles, not only in this large and informal fellowship of Dickensians, but in many other connections, some more important and some more trivial. I first had the pleasure of meeting him in his Dickensian capacity, I think, when he wrote an ingenious explanation of the *Mystery of Edwin Drood*. I represent that aggravating type of Dickensian critic who has no theory at all about *Edwin Drood*; but who criticises, generally unfavourably, any theory that anybody attempts to advance. But I remember being very much struck by Mr Edwin Charles's suggestions for a solution and thinking them far more pregnant and probable than some that were much more widely advertised. It very emphatically needs a Dickensian to finish Dickens's unfinished story. It is useless to attack it as one might attack an abstract problem (illustrated with a diagram) of which the characters are christened only A and B. Dickens was never interested in the adventures of A and B unless the B stood for Bazzard or Bud; and we have always to remember that the A very decidedly stood for Author. We have to consider what Dickens would do as well as what Bazzard would do; and even what Bazzard would do in a Dickens book is quite different from what the same sort of character would do in somebody else's book. It is useless to fit it together like a jigsaw puzzle, on the plea that you have managed to fit in all the pieces somewhere; the thing must be judged not only as a puzzle but also as a pattern; and a pattern has a certain artistic character belonging to a certain artistic mind. That reverence for the novelist, which the novelist's son truly noted in Mr Charles,

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was not a weakness but a strength for the exposition of the novel. It ensured that the story would be carried on, if not by the same mind, to some extent in the same mood. It would not be a case of a man explaining a book in the spirit of winning a bet; the *tour de force* of doing it somehow. The same sympathy and enthusiasm has led Mr Charles to these studies of some of the feminine characters in Dickens; and being myself the sort of good Dickensian who talks all night, I should be delighted to talk all night about each of his subjects. In many cases I should agree with him; in some cases I should argue with him; but in no cases, supposing appropriate and ideal conditions, should we go home till morning. I regret the omission of any study of Mrs Wilfer, whom I myself regard as a mighty tower rigidly and royally supporting the whole temple of the Dickens reputation. I disapprove of any disparagement of Miss Bates even for the glorification of Mrs Nickleby; indeed I think an interesting essay might be written on the deep difference under the superficial similarity; for the garrulity of Miss Bates was that of a spinster full of adventurous enquiry, while that of Mrs Nickleby was that of a married woman who had simply got used to talking as a river to flowing. But I am not going to begin any of my arguments with Mr Edwin Charles at present; at any rate not in public. I am content to salute him as one of the fellowship who keep alive the one really living tradition of a literary personality that exists in our time and which shows no signs of failing. A man may be satisfied with his solution of Drood; but none of us will ever be satisfied with our solution of Dickens; and the mystery is always fresh.

G. K. CHESTERTON.

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INTRODUCTION

"From these garish lights I vanish for evermore."

How sad was the import of these words nobody realised. They were spoken by Dickens at his Farewell Reading at St. James's Hall on March 15th, 1870, before an immense and enthusiastic audience; and on June 2nd he lay dead at Gadshill. He mentioned afterwards to a friend that when he uttered them he was irresistibly reminded of the words he had uttered in his farewell speech at Boston in 1868: "In this brief life of ours it is sad to do almost anything for the last time." It was a dramatic last appearance; but eminently fitting for a great dramatist, who in his Readings showed the public how much a single performer could do without the aid and stimulus of any of the ordinary adjuncts of the stage; how many effects of a genuinely startling character could be produced without the help of scenery, costume, limelight or mechanical contrivances.

On the appearance of *Pickwick* ("Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club" to give it its full title) the *Athenæum* prophesied for him an ephemeral popularity, to be followed by an early oblivion. Let us see!

Dickens has been dead 55 years. From that sad day in 1870 when multitudes of people passed by his open grave in Westminster Abbey, when the whole nation mourned as though for the loss of a dear personal friend, till now there have been novelists by the hundred, and novels by the thousand. Now here is a true test of the greatness of Dickens: In all that mass of production, in all the variety of characters, does there stand out one whose name leaps to the lips when necessity arises? Is there one which will

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bear the slightest comparison with any one of Dickens's characters? I do not mean such giant creations as Sam Weller, Tony Weller, Micawber, Dick Swiveller, Mantalini, Mark Tapley, Pickwick, Tom Pinch and so on; these are quite incomparable and unreachable. But any minor character! I can only recall one—Sherlock Holmes; and he is far too subtle and clever for human nature's daily food.

Or again! Has any novelist in all these years created a phrase which has passed into general use and become familiar in our mouths as household words? I wonder how often "waiting for something to turn up" has been utilised as a political jibe, or "Codlin's the friend not Short" as a political cartoon! Who was it first said: "I don't think"? Sam Weller! (subsequently Tom Pinch also). Who was it first said: "Wait and see"? Mrs Nickleby! The former phrase has been in use about a dozen years, the latter about sixteen; and *Pickwick Papers* was written in 1836, and *Nicholas Nickleby* in 1838.

These few instances are given for the satisfaction of those people who say with a superior air that Dickens is dead—in every sense; that a new and more enlightened generation has arisen which neither knows him nor wants to know him. They forget that Dickens is not only a great Novelist, but a Great Man—one of the world's few great men; that he can no more die than can Homer, or Shakespeare, or Milton, or Newman. If the various publishers who sell Dickens Complete Sets would only add their sale figures together and make them public, I am sure these prophets of a waning or departed popularity would be astounded at the total.

The following personal experience of the influence of Dickens on the rising generation is, to my mind, most illuminative and convincing. A few weeks ago I addressed close upon three hundred boys—of ages ranging from ten to fifteen; the subject being "Pickwick." I must confess to some qualms when I started, as to whether I could hold the attention of such an audience on such a subject; but I had barely got warmed up ere all my apprehensions van-

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ished. All the ninety-year-old jokes drew roars of laughter; the sordid story of the Fleet prison was listened to with rapt attention, and when I closed a three-quarters of an hour's address with the words: "Thank God for the priceless gift of Charles Dickens," the cheers were prolonged, hearty and sincere. If the bulk of British boys be equal to that sample—and I see no reason why that should not be so—the magic of Dickens is as sure a thing for the future as it has been for the past.

I was once asked—I thoroughly believe in all sincerity—whether it would not have been a good thing if Dickens had created a female Sam Weller. That was a question of perfection; we should all have received rapturously such a literary prodigy. The fact remains that no such attempt was made. Doubtless there might have been a greater character than Sam Weller; and equally doubtless there never was. From the moment that Sam was introduced into the pages of *Pickwick* he established himself as a prime favourite. It was immediately recognised that in him we had one of the supreme achievements in imaginative literature. Not only was it perceived that he was a master of chaff and slang, but he was the incarnation of the mother wit of the streets of London. Of all the great creations of Dickens, Sam Weller has proved to be incomparably the greatest favourite, by the acid test of time—the most gay, the most volatile and the most faithful. So much so, that when *Pickwick Papers* was dramatised, it was given the title of "Sam Weller, or the Pickwickians." Without an effort he won for himself universal acceptance as one whom nobody had ever seen but whom everybody recognised as at once perfectly natural and intensely original.

When it is remembered that the number of characters in Dickens's works is nearly sixteen hundred, and that more than one-third of these are females, the difficulties of giving a selection of his women that will be generally acceptable are exceedingly great. Every reader of Dickens has his or her favourite woman character; and it is possible that in many cases that favourite will be omitted from these

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pages. But that alas! is inevitable. For instance: Some years ago I addressed a large audience, the address being entitled "A Chat on Dickens." I was limited to an hour and a half. I took a pretty wide range (omitting *Pickwick* altogether, as I was subsequently giving an address on that alone) and culled as many of the flowers from the remaining books as I possibly could. Judge of my surprise when from eight to ten people spoke to me as we were dispersing, regretting the omission of some character whom they regarded as possessing a paramount interest, one man expressing his grave doubts as to my right to lecture on Dickens, seeing that I had made no mention of "Mr George" (George Rouncewell in *Bleak House*), whom he described as "one of the greatest characters ever penned in fiction."

An excellent illustration of my present difficulty. I have—however unsuccessfully—at least endeavoured to make a comprehensive selection of varying types—taking myself as a typical man in the street who knows his Dickens pretty well, and would welcome any work which might add to his knowledge, refresh his memory and increase his interest.

Some years ago it was the custom to refer to Dickens as "the Great Humanitarian," an accurate phrase, because his belief in, and his love of humanity was abounding. Seldom does he make a character irretrievably bad. It was a cardinal belief with him that man being made in the Image of God never wholly lost the spark of his divinity. There are only a few instances in which he refuses to exercise the author's royal prerogative of mercy—notably Bill Sikes, Fagin, Ralph Nickleby, Jonas Chuzzlewit, and Sampson Brass. Of all of these it may be urged in his own words with regard to Bill Sikes, that there are in the world some insensible and callous natures that do become, at last, utterly and incurably bad.

But to two at least of his worst characters does he vouchsafe a chance of obtaining some fleeting favour from his readers—Squeers and Quilp. Squeers is presented to us as an ignorant, brutal, despicable, revolting character. Yet

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when we are introduced to him as advertising for an Able Assistant—Annual Salary £5, Master of Arts preferred, we laugh at his impudence; while we loathe the brutality to the boys, we laugh at the brimstone and treacle incident; we certainly admire him when he refuses Ralph Nickleby's bribe to "keep back the truth," and when he is about to make his final exit from the book and gives us that delightful piece of parsing: "A double l—all, everything—a cobbler's weapon. U-p—up, adjective, not down. S-q-u-double-e-r-s, noun substantive, a educator of youth. Total, all up with Squeers," we feel positively pleased with him; we laugh at him—not with him. Still he leaves us laughing, and to that extent we are grateful.

Quilp is ferocious and cunning to a degree, and in his treatment of Kit Nubbles, a repulsive conspirator. Yet, we hate Sampson Brass so much, that we rejoice when Quilp makes that unworthy limb of the law smoke more than is good for him, and drink boiling hot rum from a saucepan. And there is a little humorous incident connected with Quilp which is so ludicrous that for the moment he is almost likeable.

He has been away from home for some time without a word of explanation, and is supposed to be dead. Sampson Brass is at his house preparing a descriptive advertisement of the lost body in the company of Mrs Quilp and her mother, Mrs Jiniwin. At this particularly appropriate moment Quilp returns and hiding himself behind the bedroom door which communicates with the sitting-room, is able both to see and hear. Sampson Brass has got as far as the nose. "A question now arises with relation to his nose." "Flat," said Mrs Jiniwin. "Aquiline!" cried Quilp, thrusting in his head and striking the feature with his fist. "Aquiline, you hag! Do you see it? Do you call this flat? Do you? Eh?"

Of course Quilp dies the death he deserves, but we have that one incident as a chalk in his favour—he has made us laugh.

That is the magic of Dickens; that out of the crudest and

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most unpromising dross he can extract, by his alchemy, the gold of humour.

Do you wish to escape from your worries for a brief hour or so, to have a refreshing respite from the canker of care and anxiety? You all have the key which can admit you to an enchanting entertainment—a sunburst of laughter—a cure for depression and a stimulating dope with which to achieve temporary forgetfulness. Take up a Dickens novel; read again the words of him who wrote with a heart throbbing with love, with a pen dipped in the milk of human kindness; whose humour is spontaneous and clean; who wrote for the great and the lowly, the old and the young, the rich and the poor.

It is seventeen years since I wrote my Monograph on *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.^{*} Among the many letters I received on its appearance was one which I prize most highly. It was from the then Mr Henry F. Dickens, K.C., now Sir Henry Dickens, the Common Serjeant. With one phrase in it I was extremely pleased. It ran: "What struck me more than anything else was the intense reverence shewn to my father's memory on almost every page of the book."

I know that in the intervening years that reverence has not only not decreased, but increased. It may appear in the following pages, that I may seem to criticise him whom I so truly love. Should it appear so, I beg to say that it is not intended as criticism; and must be ascribed to my imperfect appreciation of the master's mind.

For his colossal genius I have the most profound admiration; for the addition he has made to the gaiety of nations, I have the most profound regard; and for all that the sunshine of his great humanity has meant and been to me, I have the most profound gratitude.

^{*}*Keys to the Drood Mystery.* Out of print.

MRS NICKLEBY.

EXPLANATION OF CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN THIS SKETCH.

Browdie, John—Corn Factor near Dotheboy's Hall, Yorkshire.

Browdie, Mrs (née Tilda Price)—His wife.

Hawk, Sir Mulberry—A Vampire on wealthy young men.

Knag, Miss—Forewoman to Madame Mantalini.

Nickleby, Ralph	}	Brothers—Ralph a usurer; Nicholas a country gentleman.
Nickleby, Nicholas		

Nickleby, Mrs—Wife of Nicholas.

Nickleby, Kate	}	Son and daughter of Nicholas.
Nickleby, Nicholas		

Mantalini, Alfred—Husband of Madame Mantalini.

Mantalini, Madame—A fashionable dressmaker.

Pyke—Toady to Sir Mulberry Hawk.

Smike—Drudge to Squeers and protégé of the hero of the story.

Squeers, Wackford—Proprietor of Dotheboy's Hall.

Verisopht, Lord Frederick—Dupe of Sir Mulberry Hawk.

Wititterly, Mrs—Fanciful invalid to whom Kate acts as companion.

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The *Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* was begun in 1838. In that year nine monthly parts were issued—April to December. In 1839, eleven more monthly parts were issued—January to October (the latter being a double number)—and in that same month it was published in book form. It was illustrated by “Phiz” (Hablot K. Brown). Both at the time of publication, and even since the author’s death, it has been urged that the book is loose in construction and that the plot is weak and stilted. Possibly the accusation against its construction has some material basis. Dickens had not finished *Oliver Twist* when he started on *Nicholas Nickleby*, and while engaged in producing these two works he was contributing to *Bentley’s Miscellany*, of which he was editor. So *Nicholas Nickleby* was produced under such stress that during the whole time of monthly publication (twenty months) he was never once a single number in advance and possibly the printers were always clamouring for copy—in which respect to-day has nothing to learn from 1838.

Small wonder is it therefore that, in such circumstances, there should be a little looseness in construction; but what admirable disorder! I dare to say there are many authors of to-day making incomes, beside which Dickens’s earnings would appear contemptible, who would give a considerable sum for half his complaint. We know from *David Copperfield* that he was, as a boy, saturated with a knowledge of the works of Fielding, and Smollett, and that it was his childish delight—when suffering most from the presentations of Mr and Miss Murdstone—to impersonate his favourite characters in these works. He had been “Tom Jones” (a harmless one) for a week, and had sustained

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his own idea of "Roderick Random" for a month at a stretch; making his two harsh taskmasters enact the parts of all the bad characters. So great was the influence of these two authors upon his boyish mind that he admits in his preface to *Nicholas Nickleby* that with his head full of their heroes' wanderings he first formed an impression of Yorkshire schools. He was always curious about them, and when the opportunity occurred wrote about them; and by his writing, put an end to them.

Still, seeing that *Tom Jones*, *Roderick Random*, and *Peregrine Pickle* all take the high road of adventure, and are to that extent somewhat loose in construction, so Dickens, brought so early under their influence, followed their example in *Pickwick Papers* (than which no book could be looser in construction, or more fascinating), *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*. It is this very looseness of construction that freed Dickens from the shackles of a closely woven plot and enabled him to give full vent to his exuberant imagination; so that the crime of construction became the virtue of enthralling interest.

With regard to the plot, however, that is another story—because with Dickens, the plot is *not* the thing. The beauty of his novels does not lie in the plot. He was never a plot spinner. With all reverence and respect I say that any third-rate intellect might manufacture a mystery better than Dickens. But Dickens, who had an intellect of the first order, could do better than manufacture a mystery; he could make a motive—a great human motive.

For interesting incident, however, for ludicrous, humorous and dramatic situations, for delightful delineation of characters, he is without compeer; while, for variety of characters, for an almost kaleidoscopic presentment of all sorts and conditions of men and women, I think *Nicholas Nickleby* at least first among equals.

Further, it is a work which is particularly happy in its women characters, of which there are twenty, each in her own way being a fascinating study; but *the* one that stands out as an almost delirious delight is Mrs Nickleby. Her

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ceaseless flow of invertebrate talk, her rambling reminiscences, which she considers to be to the point, but which are always ridiculously inappropriate, her voluble incoherence, her idea that she is a born adjuster of all human difficulties, when she touches nothing that she does not muddle, invests her almost with an air of sublimity. A loving, doting mother to her two children, she would have allowed herself to be cut into small pieces if by so doing she could have pleased them; yet she plays into the hands of the scoundrelly Sir Mulberry Hawk in his pursuit of her daughter Kate, and on no less than three occasions when she thinks she is helping her son Nicholas, does she do exactly the contrary.

I cannot recall for the moment who it was, but some distinguished writer, after Dickens's death, discovered a prototype of Mrs Nickleby in one of Jane Austen's heroines. Well, well! every man to his humour. But he who can discover any resemblance between this flesh and blood creation, and the stilted wooden marionettes of Jane Austen possesses a mental "patent double million magnifying gas microscope of hextra power." Not that I love Jane Austen the less, but that I love Charles Dickens the more.

It has also been said that when Dickens wrote *Little Dorrit* (1855, '56 and '57) he went back to Mrs Nickleby when he created the character of Flora Finching. True there is this similarity: that each lady is voluble and incoherent; but there the likeness ends; for on careful perusal it will be found that whereas the former speaks slowly and with a due regard to punctuation, the latter has never a comma to her name, and speaks with breathless rapidity. Indeed the careful phrasing of Mrs Nickleby's audible musings adds considerably to the enjoyment of her inconsequential nonsense.

Altogether, in the world's gallery of character creations I deem Mrs Nickleby worthy of occupying a topmost niche.

I will now proceed to give some examples illustrative of the good lady's muddle-headedness.

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MRS NICKLEBY ADVISES ON FINANCE.

Mr Nicholas Nickleby lived a single man on the paternal estate until he grew tired of living alone, and then he took to wife the daughter of a neighbouring gentleman with a dower of one thousand pounds. This good lady bore him two children, a son and a daughter, and when the son was about nineteen, and the daughter fourteen, Mr Nickleby looked about him for the means of repairing his capital, now sadly reduced by this increase in his family, and the expenses of their education.

"Speculate with it," said Mrs Nickleby.

"Spec—u—late, my dear?" said Mr Nickleby, as though in doubt.

"Why not?" asked Mrs Nickleby.

"Because, my dear, if we *should* lose it," rejoined Mr Nickleby, who was a slow and time-taking speaker, "if we *should* lose it, we shall no longer be able to live, my dear."

"Fiddle," said Mrs Nickleby.

"I am not altogether sure of that, my dear," said Mr Nickleby.

"There's Nicholas," pursued the lady, "quite a young man—it's time he was in the way of doing something for himself; and Kate too, poor girl, without a penny in the world. Think of your brother! Would he be what he is, if he hadn't speculated?"*

"That's true," replied Mr Nickleby. "Very good, my dear. Yes. I *will* speculate, my dear."

He did speculate—and lost everything except the bed; and that he saved by the simple expedient of taking to it and speedily dying thereon. And ever afterwards, Mrs Nickleby was of opinion that if her husband (whom she dearly loved) had taken her advice, she and her children would have been far more prosperously circumstanced.

* Ralph Nickleby—a usurer of the 400 per cent. variety.

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A SUMMER DAY—BIRDS SINGING—ROAST PORK.

Who but a Mrs Nickleby would ever have conjured up such a monstrously incongruous association of ideas? But she does so, and, bless her! with becoming gravity.

"Kate, my dear," said Mrs Nickleby; "I don't know how it is, but a fine warm summer day like this, with the birds singing in every direction, always puts me in mind of roast pig, with sage and onion sauce, and made gravy."

"That's a curious association of ideas, is it not, mama?"

"Upon my word, my dear, I don't know," replied Mrs Nickleby. "Roast pig; let me see. On the day five weeks after you were christened, we had a roast—no that couldn't have been a pig, either, because I recollect there were a pair of them to carve, and your poor papa and I could never have thought of sitting down to two pigs—they must have been partridges. Roast pig! I hardly think we ever could have had one, now I come to remember, for your papa could never bear the sight of them in the shops, and used to say that they always put him in mind of very little babies, only the pigs had much fairer complexions; and he had a horror of little babies, too, because he couldn't very well afford any increase to his family, and had a natural dislike to the subject. It's very odd now, what can have put that in my head! I recollect dining once at Mrs Bevan's, in that broad street round the corner by the coachmaker's, where the tipsy man fell through the cellar-flap of an empty house nearly a week before the quarter-day, and wasn't found till the new tenant went in—and we had roast pig there. It must be that, I think, that reminds me of it, especially as there was a little bird in the room that would keep on singing all the time of dinner—at least, not a little bird, for it was a parrot, and he didn't sing exactly, for he talked and swore dreadfully; but I think it must be that. Indeed I am sure it must."

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By the aid of her uncle, Kate had obtained a situation at Madame Mantalini's, a fashionable dressmaker. (How one's pen lingers lovingly over the name of Mantalini—Madame's spouse; that gorgeous creature, who whenever he is in the picture, towers over the other characters like a giant amid pigmies; who even in adversity, when he is reduced to turning a mangle for his latest mistress, is still true to his old dashing self and calls her "a demd savage lamb.") The forewoman of this establishment is a Miss Knag, who takes a fancy to Kate, and they walk home together, with Mrs Nickleby, who is waiting for her daughter. Naturally the dear soul, anxious to impress so powerful an authority, expatiates on her daughter's cleverness and adaptability; of which qualities she gives the following highly illuminating example:—

A GRATEFUL BORROWER.

"She (Kate) always was clever," said Mrs Nickleby, brightening up, "always, from a baby. I recollect when she was only two years and a half old, that a gentleman who used to visit very much at our house—Mr Watkins, you know, Kate, my dear, that your poor papa went bail for, who afterwards ran away to the United States, and sent us a pair of snow shoes, with such an affectionate letter that it made your poor dear father cry for a week. You remember the letter? In which he said that he was very sorry he couldn't repay the fifty pounds just then, because his capital was all out at interest, and he was very busy making his fortune, but that he didn't forget you were his god-daughter, and he should take it very unkind if we didn't buy you a silver coral and put it down to his old account? Dear me, yes, my dear, how stupid you are! and spoke so affectionately of the old port wine that he used to drink a bottle and a half of every time he came. You must remember, Kate?"

"Yes, yes, mama; what of him?"

"Why, that Mr Watkins, my dear," said Mrs Nickleby

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slowly, as if she were making a tremendous effort to recollect something of paramount importance; "that Mr Watkins—he wasn't any relation, Miss Knag will understand, to the Watkins who kept the Old Boar in the village; by the bye, I don't remember whether it was the Old Boar or the George the Third, but it was one of the two, I know, and it's much the same—that Mr Watkins said, when you were only two years and a half old, that you were one of the most astonishing children he ever saw. He did indeed, Miss Knag, and he wasn't at all fond of children, and couldn't have had the slightest motive for doing it. I know it was he who said so, because I recollect, as well as if it was only yesterday, his borrowing twenty pounds of her poor dear papa the very moment afterwards."

A DIGRESSION.

For the purpose of fully appreciating Mrs Nickleby's most amazing suggestion, it will be necessary to interpose a few words concerning Dotheboy's Hall, Mr Wackford Squeers, the principal thereof, Nicholas and Smike.

On the death of her husband Mrs Nickleby had journeyed to London with her children and thrown herself upon the mercy of her brother-in-law, Ralph Nickleby the usurer. This gentleman had immediately provided for Nicholas by packing him off to be assistant master to Wackford Squeers, proprietor of Dotheboys Hall, one of the notorious Yorkshire schools. Nicholas had been here but a short time before his gorge rose at the wanton cruelty which Squeers exhibited towards his helpless charges; reaching a culminating point when the schoolmaster was inflicting an outrageous punishment upon the poor drudge, Smike, who had run away and been brought back by Mrs Squeers. Nicholas had vainly endeavoured to obtain forgiveness for the culprit, who was now being mercilessly flogged before the whole school.

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"Wretch," rejoined Nicholas, fiercely, "touch him at your peril! I will not stand by, and see it done. My blood is up, and I have the strength of ten such men as you. Look to yourself, for by Heaven I will not spare you, if you drive me on!"

"Stand back," cried Squeers, brandishing his weapon.

"I have a long series of insults to avenge," said Nicholas, flushed with passion; "and my indignation is aggravated by the dastardly cruelties practised on helpless infancy in this foul den. Have a care; for if you do raise the devil within me, the consequences shall fall heavily upon your own head!"

He had scarcely spoken, when Squeers, in a violent outbreak of wrath, and with a cry like the howl of a wild beast, spat upon him, and struck him a blow across the face with his instrument of torture, which raised up a bar of livid flesh as it was inflicted. Smarting with the agony of the blow, and concentrating into that one moment all his feelings of rage, scorn, and indignation, Nicholas sprang upon him, wrested the weapon from his hand, and pinning him by the throat, beat the ruffian till he roared for mercy.

The boys—with the exception of Master Squeers, who, coming to his father's assistance, harassed the enemy in the rear—moved not, hand or foot; but Mrs Squeers, with many shrieks for aid, hung on to the tail of her partner's coat, and endeavoured to drag him from his infuriated adversary; while Miss Squeers, who had been peeping through the key-hole in expectation of a very different scene, darted in at the very beginning of the attack, and after launching a shower of ink-stands at the usher's head, beat Nicholas to her heart's content: animating herself, at every blow, with the recollection of his having refused her proffered love, and thus imparting additional strength to an arm which (as she took after her mother in this respect) was, at no time, one of the weakest.

Nicholas, in the full torrent of his violence, felt the

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blows no more than if they had been dealt with feathers; but, becoming tired of the noise and uproar, and feeling that his arm grew weak besides, he threw all his remaining strength into half-a-dozen finishing cuts, and flung Squeers from him, with all the force he could muster. The violence of his fall precipitated Mrs Squeers completely over an adjacent form; and Squeers, striking his head against it in his descent, lay at his full length on the ground, stunned and motionless.

After this satisfactory performance Nicholas took his departure for London, and a day or two later was joined unexpectedly by Smike, who had again made his escape, and pleaded that he might accompany Nicholas, to be his faithful servant.

To this Nicholas agreed, and thenceafter Smike is his particular care. They journey to Portsmouth together, join Mr Vincent Crummles's theatrical company together; and by and bye are established together, with Mrs Nickleby and Kate, in a pretty little cottage at Bow.

But all this time Ralph Nickleby (who instinctively hated Nicholas from the first—a hatred which was reciprocated) and Mr Squeers had been plotting to get Smike away; and one evening called at the cottage, where jolly John Browdie, of Greta Bridge, Yorkshire, and his wife were spending the evening, and produced a Mr Snawley as the father of Smike to demand the custody of his beloved son. The whole thing is, of course, an impudent conspiracy and Nicholas refuses to part with his charge. Then comes forward Mrs Nickleby.

AN EMINENTLY PRACTICAL SOLUTION.

"I am very sorry," said Mrs Nickleby, who, with Mrs Browdie, had stood crying and biting her fingers in a corner, while Kate (very pale, but perfectly quiet) had kept as near her brother as she could. "I am very sorry, indeed, for all this. I really don't know what would be best to do, and that's the truth. Nicholas ought to be the

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best judge, and I hope he is. Of course, it's a hard thing to have to keep other people's children, though young Mr Snawley is certainly as useful and willing as it's possible for anybody to be; but, if it could be settled in any friendly manner—if old Mr Snawley, for instance, would settle to pay something certain for his board and lodging, and some fair arrangement was come to, so that we undertook to have fish twice a-week, and a pudding twice, or a dumpling, or something of that sort—I do think that it might be very satisfactory and pleasant for all parties."

What a scene! The hard-featured Uncle Ralph, the snuffling hypocritical Snawley, Squeers (who had been thrown out) demanding through the keyhole that somebody should knock Nicholas down with a candlestick, burly John Browdie defying them all, Smike terrified, Nicholas and Kate protecting and soothing him, and Mrs Nickleby and Mrs Browdie in tears. Then, ignoring all the months of anxious care which Nicholas had devoted to poor Smike, Mrs Nickleby complacently accepts the Snawley theory, describes Smike as "young Snawley," speaks of "old Mr Snawley," and burbles benignant nothings about fish and pudding. Amazing but eminently characteristic. Wondrous woman!

COLDS, AND HACKNEY-COACHES, AND THE CORN LAWS.

Ralph Nickleby had got into his clutches Lord Frederick Verisopht through the agency of Sir Mulberry Hawk; to further his ends with the young nobleman, he had given a dinner, to which his beautiful young niece, Kate, was invited; to act—all unknowingly—the part of decoy. Here she encounters the odious attentions of Sir Mulberry and goes home much upset. Shortly afterwards it so happened that while Sir Mulberry and his dupe were at the usurer's in Golden Square, Mrs Nickleby appeared, and Sir Mulberry

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at once proceeded to utilise her for the purpose of furthering his designs upon Kate. And never did mother, out of sheer maternal pride, so nearly jeopardise her daughter as did loving Mrs Nickleby. Then this conversation occurred :

"A—and how is Miss Nickleby?" said Lord Frederick. "Well, I hope?"

"She is quite well, I'm obliged to you, my lord," returned Mrs Nickleby, recovering. "Quite well. She wasn't well for some days after that day she dined here, and I can't help thinking, that she caught cold in that hackney-coach coming home: hackney-coaches, my lord, are such nasty things, that it's almost better to walk at any time, for although I believe a hackney-coachman can be transported for life, if he has a broken window, still they are so reckless, that they nearly all have broken windows. I once had a swelled face for six weeks, my lord, from riding in a hackney-coach—I think it was a hackney-coach," said Mrs Nickleby, reflecting, "though I'm not quite certain whether it wasn't a chariot; at all events I know it was a dark green, with a very long number, beginning with a nought and ending with a nine—no, beginning with a nine, and ending with a nought, that was it, and of course the stamp-office people would know at once whether it was a coach or a chariot if any inquiries were made there—however that was, there it was with a broken window, and there was I for six weeks with a swelled face—I think that was the very same hackney-coach, that we found out afterwards, had the top open all the time, and we should never even have known it, if they hadn't charged us a shilling an hour extra for having it open, which it seems is the law, or was then, and a most shameful law it appears to be—I don't understand the subject, but I should say the Corn Laws could be nothing to *that* Act of Parliament."

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MORE EXAMPLES OF KATE'S CLEVERNESS.

The two gentlemen insisted on seeing Mrs Nickleby to the omnibus; on the way :

"What a delight, what a comfort, what a happiness, this amiable creature must be to you," said Sir Mulberry, throwing into his voice an indication of the warmest feeling.

"She is indeed, sir," replied Mrs Nickleby; "she is the sweetest-tempered, kindest-hearted creature—and so clever!"

"She looks clayver," said Lord Frederick Verisopht, with the air of a judge of cleverness.

"I assure you she is, my lord," returned Mrs Nickleby. "When she was at school in Devonshire, she was universally allowed to be beyond all exception the very cleverest girl there, and there were a great many very clever ones too, and that's the truth—twenty-five young ladies, fifty guineas a-year without the et-ceteras, both the Miss Dowdles, the most accomplished, elegant, fascinating creatures—Oh dear me!" said Mrs Nickleby, "I never shall forget what pleasure she used to give me and her poor dear papa, when she was at that school, never—such a delightful letter every half-year, telling us that she was the first pupil in the whole establishment, and had made more progress than anybody else! I can scarcely bear to think of it even now. The girls wrote all the letters themselves," added Mrs Nickleby, "and the writing-master touched them up afterwards with a magnifying glass and a silver pen; at least I think they wrote them, though Kate was never quite certain about that, because she didn't know the handwriting of hers again; but any way, I know it was a circular which they all copied, and of course it was a very gratifying thing—very gratifying."

With similar recollections Mrs Nickleby beguiled the tediousness of the way, until they reached the omnibus,

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which the extreme politeness of her new friends would not allow them to leave until it actually started, when they took their hats, as Mrs Nickleby solemnly assured her hearers on many subsequent occasions, "completely off," and kissed their straw-coloured kid gloves till they were no longer visible.

CASTLES IN SPAIN.

Mrs Nickleby leant back in the furthest corner of the conveyance, and, closing her eyes, resigned herself to a host of most pleasing meditations. Kate had never said a word about having met either of these gentlemen; "that," she thought, "argues that she is strongly pre-possessed in favour of one of them." Then the question arose, which one could it be. The lord was the youngest, and his title was certainly the grandest; still Kate was not the girl to be swayed by such considerations as these. "I will never put any constraint upon her inclinations," said Mrs Nickleby to herself; "but upon my word I think there's no comparison between his lordship and Sir Mulberry. Sir Mulberry is such an attentive gentlemanly creature, so much manner, such a fine man, and has so much to say for himself. I hope it's Sir Mulberry; I think it must be Sir Mulberry!" And then her thoughts flew back to her old predictions, and the number of times she had said, that Kate with no fortune would marry better than other people's daughters with thousands; and, as she pictured with the brightness of a mother's fancy all the beauty and grace of the poor girl who had struggled so cheerfully with her new life of hardship and trial, her heart grew too full, and the tears trickled down her face.

MRS NICKLEBY ON SHAKESPEARE.

At a certain gathering at the house of a Mrs Witterly, at which Lord Frederick Verisopht, Sir Mulberry Hawk, and Mrs Nickleby were present, the conversation turned upon

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Shakespeare, and Verisopht expressed the opinion that Shakespeare was "a clayver man." The dramatist's birth-place was then mentioned and Mrs Nickleby at once took a hand in the conversation :

"I think there must be something in the place," said Mrs Nickleby, "for, soon after I was married, I went to Stratford with my poor dear Mr Nickleby, in a post-chaise from Birmingham—was it a post-chaise though!" said Mrs Nickleby, considering; "yes, it must have been a post-chaise, because I recollect remarking at the time that the driver had a green shade over his left eye;—in a post-chaise from Birmingham, and after we had seen Shakspeare's tomb and birth-place, we went back to the inn there, where we slept that night, and I recollect that all night long I dreamt of nothing but a black gentleman, at full length, in plaster-of-Paris, with a lay down collar tied with two tassels, leaning against a post and thinking; and when I woke in the morning and described him to Mr Nickleby, he said it was Shakspeare just as he had been when he was alive, which was very curious indeed. Stratford—Stratford," continued Mrs Nickleby, considering. "Yes, I am positive about that, because I recollect I was in the family way with my son Nicholas at the time, and I had been very much frightened by an Italian image boy that very morning. In fact, it was quite a mercy, ma'am," added Mrs Nickleby, in a whisper to Mrs Witterly, "that my son didn't turn out to be a Shakspeare, and what a dreadful thing that would have been!"

A BEAR IN OXFORD STREET.

On being introduced to Smike, Mrs Nickleby burst into hysterical tears because the name reminded her so much of Pyke—a rascal attached to Sir Mulberry Hawk, as to whose character by this time she had been duly enlightened.

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"It's so like Pyke," cried Mrs Nickleby; "so exactly like Pyke. Oh, don't speak to me—I shall be better presently."

After exhibiting every symptom of slow suffocation, in all its stages, and drinking about a tea-spoonful of water from a full tumbler, and spilling the remainder, Mrs Nickleby *was* better, and remarked, with a feeble smile, that she was very foolish, she knew.

"It's a weakness in our family," said Mrs Nickleby, "so, of course, I can't be blamed for it. Your grand-mama, Kate, was exactly the same—precisely. The least excitement, the slightest surprise—she fainted away directly. I have heard her say, often and often, that when she was a young lady, and before she was married, she was turning a corner into Oxford-street one day, when she ran against her own hair-dresser, who, it seems, was escaping from a bear;—the mere suddenness of the encounter made her faint away, directly. Wait, though," added Mrs Nickleby, pausing to consider, "Let me be sure I'm right. Was it her hair-dresser who had escaped from a bear, or was it a bear who had escaped from her hair-dresser's? I declare I can't remember just now, but the hair-dresser was a very handsome man, I know, and quite a gentleman in his manners; so that it has nothing to do with the point of the story."

NIGHT-CAPS OF VARIOUS SORTS.

"People may say what they like," observed Mrs Nickleby, "but there's a great deal of comfort in a night-cap, as I'm sure you would confess, Nicholas, my dear, if you would only have strings to yours, and wear it like a Christian, instead of sticking it upon the very top of your head like a blue-coat boy. You needn't think it an unmanly or quizzical thing to be particular about your night-cap, for I have often heard your poor dear papa,

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and the Reverend Mr what's his name, who used to read prayers in that old church with the curious little steeple that the weathercock was blown off the night week before you were born,—I have often heard them say, that the young men at college are uncommonly particular about their night-caps, and that the Oxford night-caps are quite celebrated for their strength and goodness; so much so, indeed, that the young men never dream of going to bed without 'em, and I believe it's admitted on all hands that *they* know what's good, and don't coddle themselves."

THE MALIGN INFLUENCE OF LEATHER.

"There was a case in the day before yesterday's paper," said Mrs Nickleby, "extracted from one of the French newspapers, about a journeyman shoemaker who was jealous of a young girl in an adjoining village, because she wouldn't shut herself up in an air-tight three-pair-of stairs and charcoal herself to death with him; and who went and hid himself in a wood with a sharp-pointed knife, and rushed out, as she was passing by with a few friends, and killed himself first and then all the friends, and then her—no, killed all the friends first, and then herself, and then *himself*—which it is quite frightful to think of. Somehow or other," added Mrs Nickleby, after a momentary pause, "they always *are* journeyman shoemakers who do these things in France, according to the papers. I don't know how it is—something in the leather, I suppose."

Perhaps the best example of the way in which Mrs Nickleby prides herself on the superiority of her common-sense is to be found in the ludicrous incident of her courtship by a madman. This person, who lived next door to the cottage at Bow, had first declared his passion by flinging vegetable-marrows, cucumbers and other vegetables over the garden wall. He then alarmed the family one night by

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coming down the chimney. This was his keeper's description of him :

"I never came across such a vagabond, and my mate says the same. Broke his poor wife's heart, turned his daughters out of doors, drove his sons into the streets; it was a blessing he went mad at last, through evil tempers, and covetousness, and selfishness, and guzzling, and drinking, or he'd have drove many other so. Hope for *him*, an old rip! There isn't too much hope going, but I'll bet a crown that what there is, is saved for more deserving chaps than him, anyhow."

Now how does Mrs Nickleby treat this official declaration as to this man's state of mind?

"It's some plot of these people to possess themselves of his property—didn't he say so himself? He may be a little odd and flighty, perhaps, many of us are that; but downright mad! and express himself as he does, respectfully, and in quite poetical language, and making offers with so much thought, and care, and prudence—not as if he ran into the streets, and went down upon his knees to the first chit of a girl he met, as a madman would! No, no, Kate, there's a great deal too much method in *his* madness; depend upon that, my dear."

Just one more phrase of this sweet, simple soul—and I reluctantly leave her. Only three words that she says to Nicholas—but how much those three words have been used for political purposes these last fifteen years!

"Wait and see," she says to Nicholas (Ch : lv.).

Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, is popularly credited with having originated "Peace with honour," when the phrase is Shakespeare's; both Spurgeon and General Booth have been credited with originating "Why should the Devil have all the good tunes?" when the phrase was first used by the Rev. Rowland Hill (1744-1833); and to Mr Asquith has

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been attributed the credit (or otherwise) of originating "Wait and see." But the triumph is Mrs Nickleby's. Let her at least have the credit of the one, short, sensible sentence she ever used.

And again I say: "Bless her!"

II

MRS LIRRIPER'S LODGERS.

From "Christmas Stories in *All the Year Round*)

EXPLANATION OF CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN THIS SKETCH.

Edson, Mr—One of Mrs Lirriper's Lodgers, who decamps.

Edson, Mrs—His wife.

Jackman, Major—The "Parlour" Boarder of Mrs Lirriper
and her staunch friend.

Lirriper, Mrs—Lodging-house Keeper, of Norfolk Street,
Strand.



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Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings appeared as a Christmas Story in *All the Year Round*, a magazine started in 1859 to take the place of *Household Words*. The start of *All the Year Round* will be for ever memorable in that its first number contained the opening chapters of *A Tale of Two Cities*.

The Christmas Stories in *All the Year Round* occupy a high place in Dickens's Miscellaneous Works, seeing that they comprise such gems as *Dr Marigold's Prescriptions*, *Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings*, and *No Thoroughfare*, the latter having been written in conjunction with Wilkie Collins.

Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings was written in 1863, and I have always regarded it as a perfect cameo in the shape of story-telling, and Mrs Lirriper herself as one of the most perfect gentlewomen ever pictured. Doubtless she may have had troubles with her aitches, certainly with her punctuation, and got mixed with her relative pronouns; but what be these compared with truth, honesty, chivalrous tenderness, and charity (including the greater charity—that of thought); all of which virtues Mrs Lirriper possessed in a marked degree.

THE HONOUR OF THE POOR.

See in what high esteem she held the good name of her dead husband :—

My poor Lirriper being behindhand with the world and being buried at Hatfield church in Hertfordshire, not that it was his native place but that he had a liking for the Salisbury Arms where we went upon our wedding-day, and passed as happy a fortnight as ever happy was, I went

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round to the creditors and I says "Gentlemen I am acquainted with the fact that I am not answerable for my late husband's debts but I wish to pay them for I am his lawful wife and his good name is dear to me. I am going into the Lodgings gentlemen as a business and if I prosper every farthing that my late husband owed shall be paid for the sake of the love I bore him, by this right hand." It took a long time to do but it was done, and the silver cream-jug which is between ourselves and the bed and the mattress in my room up-stairs (or it would have found legs so sure as ever the Furnished bill was up) being presented by the gentlemen engraved "To Mrs Lirriper a mark of grateful respect for her honourable conduct" gave me a turn which was too much for my feelings, till Mr Betley which at that time had the parlours and loved his joke says "Cheer up Mrs Lirriper, you should feel as if it was only your christening and they were your godfathers and godmothers which did promise for you." And it brought me round, and I don't mind confessing to you my dear that I then put a sandwich and a drop of sherry in a little basket and went down to Hatfield church-yard outside the coach and kissed my hand and laid it with a kind of proud swelling love on my husband's grave, though bless you it had taken me so long to clear his name that my wedding-ring was worn quite fine and smooth when I laid it on the green waving grass.

The picture of this courageous woman, sitting by her husband's grave and saying to him: "My dear, I have cleared your name—now rest in peace," is particularly touching and peculiarly appealing. If the dead know ought of what the living are doing, there was on that day one proud and happy ghost in the spirit-world.

Mrs Lirriper's Lodging-house was in Norfolk Street, Strand, and her most valued lodger was a gentleman named Major Jackman, who occupied the parlours. I have chosen the following incident because it more fully reveals this dear woman's chivalrous character.

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A GOOD LET.

It was the third year nearly up of the Major's being in the parlours that early one morning in the month of February when Parliament was coming on and you may therefore suppose a number of impostors were about ready to take hold of anything they could get, a gentleman and a lady from the country came in to view the Second, and I well remember that I had been looking out of window and had watched them and the heavy sleet driving down the street together looking for bills. I did not quite take to the face of the gentleman though he was good-looking too but the lady was a very pretty young thing and delicate, and it seemed too rough for her to be out at all. The gentleman proposed three months certain and the money in advance and leave then reserved to renew on the same terms for six months more. I said I was not quite certain but that I might have engaged myself to another party but would step down-stairs and look into it if they would take a seat. They took a seat and I went down to the handle of the Major's door that I had already began to consult finding it a great blessing, and I knew by his whistling in a whisper that he was varnishing his boots which was generally considered private, however he kindly calls out "If it's you, Madam, come in," and I went in and told him.

"Well, Madam," says the Major rubbing his nose—as I did fear at the moment with the black sponge but it was only his knuckle, he being always neat and dexterous with his fingers—"well, Madam, I suppose you would be glad of the money?"

I was delicate of saying "Yes" too out, for a little extra colour rose into the Major's cheeks and there was irregularity which I will not particularly specify in a quarter which I will not name.

"I am of opinion, Madam," says the Major "that when money is ready for you—when it is ready for you, Mrs

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Lirriper—you ought to take it. What is there against it, Madam, in this case up-stairs?"

"I really cannot say there is anything against it, sir, still I thought I would consult you."

"You said a newly-married couple, I think, Madam?" says the Major.

I says "Ye-es. Evidently. And indeed the young lady mentioned to me in a casual way that she had not been married many months."

The Major rubbed his nose again and stirred the varnish round and round in its little saucer with his piece of sponge and took to his whistling in a whisper for a few moments. Then he says "You would call it a Good Let, Madam?"

"O certainly a Good Let sir."

"Say they renew for the additional six months. Would it put you about very much Madame if—if the worst was to come to the worst?" said the Major.

"Well I hardly know," I says to the Major. "It depends upon circumstances. Would *you* object Sir for instance?"

"I?" says the Major. "Object? Jemmy Jackman? Mrs Lirriper close with the proposal."

So I went up-stairs and accepted, and they came in next day which was Saturday and the Major was so good as to draw up a Memorandum of an agreement in a beautiful round hand and expressions that sounded to me equally legal and military, and Mr Edson signed it on the Monday morning and the Major called upon Mr Edson on the Tuesday and Mr Edson called upon the Major on the Wednesday and the Second and the parlours were as friendly as could be wished.

CRUEL WORK.

The three months paid for had run out and we had got without any fresh overtures as to payment into May my dear, when there came an obligation upon Mr Edson to

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go a business expedition right across the Isle of Man, which fell quite unexpected upon that pretty little thing and is not a place that according to my views is particularly in the way to anywhere at any time but that may be a matter of opinion. So short a notice was it that he was to go next day, and dreadfully she cried poor pretty, and I am sure I cried too when I saw her on the cold pavement in the sharp east wind—it being a very backward spring that year—taking a last leave of him with her pretty bright hair blowing this way and that and her arms clinging round his neck and him saying “There there there. Now let me go Peggy.” And by that time it was plain that what the Major had been so accommodating as to say he would not object to happening in the house, would happen in it, and I told her as much when he was gone while I comforted her with my arm up the staircase, for I says “You will soon have others to keep up for my pretty and you must think of that.”

His letter never came when it ought to have come and what she went through morning after morning when the postman brought none for her the very postman himself compassioned when she ran down to the door, and yet we cannot wonder at its being calculated to blunt the feelings to have all the trouble of other people's letters and none of the pleasure and doing it oftener in the mud and mizzle than not and at a rate of wages more resembling Little Britain than Great. But at last one morning when she was too poorly to come running down-stairs he says to me with a pleased look in his face that made me next to love the man in his uniform coat though he was dripping wet “I have taken you first in the street this morning Mrs Lirriper, for here's the one for Mrs Edson.” I went up to her bedroom with it as fast as ever I could go, and she sat up in bed when she saw it and kissed it and tore it open and then a blank stare came upon her. “It's very short!” she says lifting her large eyes to my face. “O Mrs Lirriper it's very short!” I says “My dear Mrs Edson no doubt that's because your husband

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hadn't time to write more just at that time." "No doubt, no doubt," says she, and puts her two hands on her face and turns round in her bed.

I shut her softly in and I crept down-stairs and I tapped at the Major's door, and when the Major having his thin slices of bacon in his own Dutch oven saw me he came out of his chair and put me down on the sofa. "Hush!" says he, "I see something's the matter. Don't speak—take time." I says "O Major I'm afraid there's cruel work up-stairs." "Yes yes" says he "I had begun to be afraid of it—take time." And then in opposition to his own words he rages out frightfully, and says "I shall never forgive myself Madam, that I, Jemmy Jackman, didn't see it all that morning—didn't go straight up-stairs when my boot-sponge was in my hand—didn't force it down his throat—and choke him dead with it on the spot!"

The Major and me agreed when we came to ourselves that just at present we could do no more than take on to suspect nothing and use our best endeavours to keep that poor young creature quiet, and what I ever should have done without the Major when it got about among the organ-men that quiet was our object is unknown, for he made lion and tiger war upon them to that degree that without seeing it I could not have believed it was in any gentleman to have such a power of bursting out with fire-irons walking-sticks water-jugs coals potatoes off his table the very hat off his head, and at the same time so furious in foreign languages that they would stand with their handles half-turned fixed like the Sleeping Ugly—for I cannot say Beauty.

CRUEL WORK.

Ever to see the postman come near the house now gave me such a fear that it was a reprieve when he went by, but in about another ten days or a fortnight he says again, "Here's one for Mrs Edson.—Is she pretty well?" "She

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is pretty well postman, but not well enough to rise so early as she used" which was so far gospel-truth.

I carried the letter in to the Major at his breakfast and I says tottering "Major I have not the courage to take it up to her."

"It's an ill-looking villain of a letter," says the Major.

"I have not the courage Major" I says again in a tremble "to take it up to her."

After seeming lost in consideration for some moments the Major says, raising his head as if something new and useful had occurred to his mind "Mrs Lirriper, I shall never forgive myself that I, Jemmy Jackman, didn't go straight up-stairs that morning when my boot-sponge was orce it down his throat—and choke him

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a little hasty "you didn't do it which would have done no good and I think better employed on your own honourable

rational, and planned that I should tap or and lay the letter on the mat outside upper landing for what might happen, powder cannon-balls or shells or rockets and that dreadful letter was by me as I and floor.

scream sounded through the house the and opened it, and I found her on the her life was gone. My dear I never of the letter which was lying open by no occasion.

Everything I needed to bring her round the Major brought up with his own hands, besides running out to the chemist's for what was not in the house and likewise having the fiercest of all his many skirmishes with a musical instrument representing a ball-room I do not know in what particular country and company waltzing in and out at folding-doors with rolling eyes. When after a long time I saw her coming to, I slipped on the landing

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till I heard her cry, and then I went in and says cheerily "Mrs Edson you're not well my dear and it's not to be wondered at," as if I had not been in before. Whether she believed or disbelieved I cannot say and it would signify nothing if I could, but I stayed by her for hours and then she God ever blesses me! and says she will try to rest for her head is bad.

"Major," I whispers, looking in at the parlours, "I beg and pray of you don't go out."

The Major whispers, "Madam, trust me I will do no such thing. How is she?"

I says "Major the good Lord above us only knows what burns and rages in her poor mind. I left her sitting at her window. I am going to sit at mine."

THE BLACK-FLOWING RIVER.

It came on afternoon and it came on evening. Norfolk is a delightful street to lodge in—provided you don't go lower down—but of a summer evening when the dust and waste paper lie in it and stray children play in it and a kind of a gritty calm and bake settles on it and a peal of church-bells is practising in the neighbourhood it is a trifle dull, and never have I seen it since at such a time and never shall I see it evermore at such a time without seeing the dull June evening when that forlorn young creature sat at her open corner window on the second and me at my open corner window (the other corner) on the third. Something merciful, something wiser and better far than my own self, had moved me while it was yet light to sit in my bonnet and shawl, and as the shadows fell and the tide rose I could sometimes—when I put out my head and looked at her window below—see that she leaned out a little looking down the street. It was just settling dark when I saw *her* in the street.

So fearful of losing sight of her that it almost stops my breath while I tell it, I went down-stairs faster than I ever moved in all my life and only tapped with my hand

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at the Major's door in passing it and slipping out. She was gone already. I made the same speed down the street and when I came to the corner of Howard-street I saw that she had turned it and was there plain before me going towards the west. O with what a thankful heart I saw her going along!

She was quite unacquainted with London and had very seldom been out for more than an airing in our own street where she knew two or three little children belonging to neighbours and had sometimes stood among them at the street looking at the water. She must be going at hazard I knew, still she kept the bye-streets quite correctly as long as they would serve her, and then turned up into the Strand. But at every corner I could see her head turned one way, and that way was always the river way.

It may have been only the darkness and quiet of the Adelphi that caused her to strike into it but she struck into it much as readily as if she had set out to go there, which perhaps was the case. She went straight down to the Terrace and along it and looked over the iron rail, and I often woke afterwards in my own bed with the horror of seeing her do it. The desertion of the wharf below and the flowing of the high water there seemed to settle her purpose. She looked about as if to make out the way down, and she struck out the right way or the wrong way—I don't know which, for I don't know the place before or since—and I followed her the way she went.

It was noticeable that all this time she never once looked back. But there was now a great change in the manner of her going, and instead of going at a steady quick walk with her arms folded before her,—among the dark dismal arches she went in a wild way with her arms open wide, as if they were wings and she was flying to her death.

We were on the wharf and she stopped. I stopped. I saw her hands at her bonnet-strings, and I rushed between her and the brink and took her round the waist with both

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my arms. She might have drowned me, I felt then, but she could never have got quit of me.

Down to that moment my mind had been all in a maze and not half an idea had I had in it what I should say to her, but the instant I touched her it came to me like magic and I had my natural voice and my senses and even almost my breath.

"Mrs Edson!" I says "My dear! Take care. How ever did you lose your way and stumble on a dangerous place like this? Why you must have come here by the most perplexing streets in all London. No wonder you are lost, I'm sure. And this place too! Why I thought nobody ever got here, except me to order my coals and the Major in the parlours to smoke his cigar!"—for I saw that blessed man close by, pretending to it.

"Hah—Hah—Hum!" coughs the Major.

"And good gracious me" I says, "why here he is!"

"Halloa! who goes there?" says the Major in a military manner.

"Well!" I says, "if this don't beat everything! Don't you know us Major Jackman?"

"Halloa!" says the Major. "Who calls on Jemmy Jackman?" (and more out of breath he was, and did it less like life than I should have expected.)

"Why here's Mrs Edson, Major" I says, "strolling out to cool her poor head which has been very bad, has missed her way and got lost, and Goodness knows where she might have got to but for me coming here to drop an order into my coal merchant's letter-box and you coming here to smoke your cigar!—And you really are not well enough my dear" I says to her "to be half so far from home without me.—And your arm will be very acceptable I am sure Major" I says to him "and I know she may lean upon it as heavy as she likes." And now we had both got her—thanks be Above!—one on each side.

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WOMANLY CHIVALRY.

She was all in a cold shiver and she so continued till I laid her on her own bed, and up to the early morning she held me by the hand and moaned and moaned "O wicked, wicked, wicked!" But when at last I made believe to droop my head and be overpowered with a dead sleep, I heard that poor young creature give such touching and such humble thanks for being preserved from taking her own life in her madness that I thought I should have cried my eyes out on the counterpane and I knew she was safe.

Being well enough to do and able to afford it, me and the Major laid our little plans next day while she was asleep worn out, and so I says to her as soon as I could do it nicely :

"Mrs Edson my dear, when Mr Edson paid me the rent for these farther six months—"

She gave a start and I felt her large eyes look at me, but I went on with it and with my needlework.

"—I can't say that I am quite sure I dated the receipt right. Could you let me look at it?"

She laid her frozen cold hand upon mine and she looked through me when I was forced to look up from my needlework, but I had taken the precaution of having on my spectacles.

"I have no receipt" says she.

"Ah! Then he has got it" I says in a careless way. "It's of no great consequence. A receipt's a receipt."

From that time she always had hold of my hand when I could spare it which was generally only when I read to her, for of course she and me had our bits of needlework to plod at and neither of us was very handy at those little things, though I am still rather proud of my share in them too considering. And though she took to all I read to her, I used to fancy that next to what was taught upon the Mount she took most of all to His gentle compassion for us poor women and to His young life and to how His

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mother was proud of Him and treasured His sayings in her heart. She had a grateful look in her eyes that never never never will be out of mine until they are closed in my last sleep, and when I chanced to look at her without thinking of it I would always meet that look, and she would often offer me her trembling lip to kiss, much more like a little affectionate half broken-hearted child than ever I can imagine any grown person.

A GIFT TO A CHILDLESS WOMAN.

One time the trembling of this poor lip was so strong and her tears ran down so fast that I thought she was going to tell me all her woe, so I takes her two hands in mine and I says :

"No my dear not now, you had best not try to do it now. Wait for better times when you have got over this and are strong, and then you shall tell me whatever you will. Shall it be agreed?"

With our hands still joined she nodded her head many times, and she lifted my hands and put them to her lips and to her bosom.

"Only one word now my dear" I says. "Is there any one?"

She looked inquiringly "Any one?"

"That I can go to?"

She shook her head.

"No one that I can bring?"

She shook her head.

"No one is wanted by *me* my dear. Now that may be considered past and gone."

Not much more than a week afterwards—for this was far on in the time of our being so together—I was bending over at her bedside with my ear down to her lips, by turns listening for her breath and looking for a sign of life in her face. At last it came in a solemn way—not in a flash but like a kind of pale faint light brought very slow to the face.

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She said something to me that had no sound in it, but I saw she asked me :

“Is this death?”

And I says :

“Poor dear poor dear, I think it is.”

Knowing somehow that she wanted me to move her weak right hand, I took it and laid it on her breast and then folded her other hand upon it, and she prayed a good prayer and I joined in it poor me though there were no words spoke. Then I brought the baby in its wrappers from where it lay, and I says :

“My dear this is sent to a childless old woman. This is for me to take care of.”

The trembling lip was put up towards my face for the last time, and I dearly kissed it.

“Yes my dear,” I says. “Please God! Me and the Major.”

I don't know how to tell it right, but I saw her soul brighten and leap up, and get free and fly away in the grateful look.

I make bold to paraphrase Thackeray's words and to say, that the presentation of such a character is equivalent to conferring upon mankind a personal benefit. She is an encouragement to many and an example to all; and it would be the acme of praise to any lady, however highly placed, if it could be truly said of her that she possessed the keen sense of justice and of honour, the loyalty, the gentleness, the chivalrous consideration and the loving kindness of Mrs Lirriper.

III

THE DESERTED BRIDE.

(Miss Havisham—from *Great Expectations*)

EXPLANATION OF CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN THIS SKETCH.

Biddy—Girl friend of Pip, companion to Mrs Gargery; afterwards the second Mrs Gargery.

Drummle, Bentley—Estella's husband.

Estella—Miss Havisham's protégée, loved by Pip.

Gargery, Joe—A village blacksmith.

Gargery, Mrs—Wife of Joe and sister of Pip.

Havisham, Miss—The central figure of this sketch.

Pirrip, Philip ("Pip")—The hero and narrator of the story.

Pocket, Herbert—Pip's boyish antagonist; afterwards his reading companion and friend.

Pumblechook—Pip's hypocritical uncle.

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In the great thoroughfare of Bishopsgate, and nearly facing the Southern exit of Liverpool Street Station, is the hostelry and wine-vaults known as "Dirty Dick's"—under which name it has attained almost a world-wide celebrity. The country cousin who spends a week or so in Town considers the stay incomplete if there has been no visit to these premises; while the American visitor makes a journey there a feature in his itinerary.

It is due to Dickens that this place acquired more than a local celebrity; for in *Household Words* there appeared an article: "The History of Dirty Dick—a Legend of Bishopsgate Without." From this it appears that the founder of the business—Nathaniel Bentley—died in 1761, bequeathing the whole of his property—which was considerable—to his son, who was called "Young Bentley" even after his father's death. The heir thenceforth never appeared in public otherwise than in the most fashionable attire, and with his hair artistically dressed by a court perruquier.

Suddenly his dandified habits changed; he became negligent of his dress, and attended his business in his shirt-sleeves, and generally unshaven. Once when a friend remonstrated with him on his want of cleanliness he replied: "It's of no use; if I wash my hands to-day, they will be dirty again to-morrow."

What was the reason for this sudden change from splendid attire and scrupulous cleanliness, to disordered garments and filth? The ever old, yet ever new story—a woman. He was engaged to a young girl to whom he was devotedly attached, and, to celebrate his engagement, he invited his intended bride and a number of personal friends to a splendid entertainment at his place of business. But alas! Once again

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was the old proverb, "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," verified. On the very day fixed for the feast, news came of the death of his bride-to-be. He at once ordered that the room in which the banquet was to have been held should be closed and never opened again in his lifetime, and the feast provided was left to be eaten by the rats, mice and spiders, and everything else to go to ruin and decay.

Seeing that this article appeared in *Household Words* during the time it was under Dickens's personal direction, what a striking parallel does it offer to the case of Miss Havisham, in *Great Expectations*!

Miss Havisham was a spoilt child, heiress of a wealthy brewer and country gentleman. She became attached to a man altogether unworthy of her—an adventurer and a scamp. The wedding-day was fixed, the wedding dresses bought, the wedding tour planned, the wedding guests invited. The wedding morning came, but instead of the bridegroom there came a letter heartlessly breaking off the engagement. Thenceforward, for the rest of her existence, the deserted bride appeared dressed in her bridal array, just as she was when the letter came, even to the wearing of only one shoe. From that moment no daylight was permitted in the house, and she lived either in the room in which she had been dressing or in the one in which the wedding breakfast was laid. In neither was anything allowed to be touched; and when we first see this room, the centrepiece on the breakfast table is so heavily overhung with cobwebs that its form is quite indistinguishable; spiders are running either to or from it, mice are rattling behind the panels, and black beetles are crawling about the hearth.

A marvellous parallel! heightened if possible by the fact that the Christian name of one of the characters is "Bentley."

Great Expectations first appeared in serial form in the December issue—1860—of *All the Year Round*, a weekly serial started in 1859 to take the place of *Household Words*; so it is obvious that the article on "Dirty Dick" was written

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before, at any rate, *Great Expectations* was published. The story was contained in weekly numbers in 1861, running till August, when it was published in book form.

His previous work, *A Tale of Two Cities*, had strongly gripped the public imagination. Between the issue of this noble work and *Great Expectations* there had been an interval of a year, part of the time being utilised for many walks—accompanied doubtless by much musing—in that part of Kent which lies between the Thames and the Medway; and it is in the little lonely churchyard of the village of Cooling, there situated, that Pip is found, in the opening chapter of *Great Expectations*; and, while regarding the five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, sacred to the memory of his five little brothers who gave up trying to get a living exceedingly early in life, he is frightened by the escaped convict who plays so important a part in his subsequent career.

The public of that day might well be pardoned for showing a little pleasing anxiety as to whether their favourite author, after writing so powerful a novel as *A Tale of Two Cities*, could produce anything approaching it in interest. But this anxiety was soon allayed, for with the appearance of the very first chapters of *Great Expectations* it was seen that the delightful Dickens of *David Copperfield*—a little eclipsed by the austere Dickens of *Bleak House*, *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit*—was again in evidence. Here again with Pip, the hero, he shows that marvellous insight into the workings of a child's mind so characteristic of *David Copperfield*, and in a lesser degree of Paul Dombey and Little Nell; and *Great Expectations* may properly be regarded as one of his most closely knit as well as one of his most picturesque stories.

It is so characteristic of Dickens—whether intentional or not I cannot say—that there are women in the book far more interesting than the heroine. Estella, a singularly beautiful but haughty girl, the protégée of Miss Havisham, brought up to avenge on mankind the outrageous insult offered that disappointed lady, is nearly a repulsive char-

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acter. The only bit of real humanity she shows is when she invites Pip to kiss her after he has fought and beaten another boy. For her to marry a brute like Bentley Drummle, knowing him to be a brute, for the set purpose of furthering Miss Havisham's revenge on all men, seems very much like the process of cutting off the nose to spite the face. The final words of the book indicate that she and Pip (who always loved her) are at length united; but my personal predilection is all in favour of Dickens's original intention of giving the book an unhappy ending rather than that this wilful girl should finally triumph by bringing Pip to her feet.

Pip's masterly sister, who brought that young gentleman "up by hand," and married Joe Gargery, the blacksmith, is a splendidly drawn character of the mistress of a cottage, who rules husband and brother with a rod of iron, gives to intense housework a repellant appearance and makes cleanliness so uncomfortable that comfortable dirt would be preferable.

Biddy, who becomes the second Mrs Joe, is her exact antithesis—lovable and thoughtful to a degree. The crew of greedy relatives who crowd round the unfortunate Miss Havisham, waiting for dead women's shoes, are grotesquely unattractive; and seem to serve no useful purpose, lest it be that of showing to what lengths of servile obsequiousness such "waiters" will go.

I select Miss Havisham for this sketch because, to my mind, she is the dominant female character in the book. It is she who sends for Pip to go and "play" at her house, in the rooms in which she sits perpetually surveying the material evidences of her ruined life. It is she who gets Pip apprenticed to Joe Gargery and gives him twenty-five guineas as a premium; it is her solicitor who makes the first announcement to Pip that he has "Great Expectations"; and it is to her that Pip goes in all the bravery of his new attire to say good-bye when he is leaving for London—believing her to be his benefactress.

At a cursory glance it would seem as though Dickens

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deliberately tried to deceive his readers into the belief that it is Miss Havisham to whom Pip owes his good fortune; Pip himself believes this to be the case—and further believes that it is her design to give him Estella. But those who have studied the ways and methods of Dickens will know that in many of his novels, the key to the ultimate development of the plot is found very early in the book. In *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Our Mutual Friend* it is in the first chapter; and in *Bleak House* it is in the second. So in *Great Expectations* Pip's meeting with the convict in the churchyard is the shadow cast before to show the coming of his prosperity. And when Miss Havisham gives Joe the premium of twenty-five guineas she says deliberately and definitely that he is to expect "no other reward and no more." All will agree that Miss Havisham, who had resolutely led such a miserable life for so many, many years, was a lady of singular determination.

Both at the time of the publication of *Great Expectations* and subsequently it has been said that the character of Miss Havisham is strained and unnatural. To which I reply: Was not her experience strained and unnatural? Rich, spoiled and petted, she found herself deserted almost at the very altar by the man on whom she had showered her maiden affections—a man she afterwards discovered to be the scoundrel who had joined with her half-brother in plundering her—a liar, a thief and a forger. What wonder that she became warped, strained and unnatural? Stranger wonder, had she remained normal!

Let her miserable life story now speak for itself, and drive home with reiterated force the lesson contained in those pregnant words: "Vengeance is mine saith the Lord; I will repay."

PIP IS SENT TO PLAY AT MISS HAVISHAM'S.

Uncle Pumblechook, hearing that Miss Havisham requires a boy to play at "Satis" House, secures the appointment for Pip. Mrs Joe therefore vigorously prepares him over-

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night for the visit; and the following is an eloquent description of her "cleansing" methods:

With that, she pounced on me, like an eagle on a lamb, and my face was squeezed into wooden bowls in sinks, and my head was put under taps of water-butts, and I was soaped, and kneaded, and towelled, and thumped, and harrowed, and rasped, until I really was quite beside myself. (I may here remark that I suppose myself to be better acquainted than any living authority, with the ridgy effect of a wedding-ring, passing unsympathetically over the human countenance.)

The door of "Satis" House is opened by Estella, who treats Pip with great scorn.

Though she called me "boy" so often, and with a carelessness that was far from complimentary, she was of about my own age. She seemed much older than I, of course, being a girl, and beautiful and self-possessed; and she was as scornful of me as if she had been one-and-twenty, and a queen.

Pip is escorted up the dark staircase, lighted only by a single candle carried by Estella, and at length finds himself in a pretty large room, well lighted with wax candles.

It was a dressing-room, as I supposed from the furniture, though much of it was of forms and uses then quite unknown to me. But prominent in it was a draped table with a gilded looking-glass, and that I made out at first sight to be a fine lady's dressing-table.

Whether I should have made out this object so soon, if there had been no fine lady sitting at it, I cannot say. In an arm-chair, with an elbow resting on the table and her head leaning on that hand, sat the strangest lady I have ever seen, or shall ever see.

She was dressed in rich materials—satins, and lace, and silks—all of white. Her shoes were white. And she

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had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about. She had not quite finished dressing, for she had but one shoe on—the other was on the table near her hand—her veil was but half arranged, her watch and chain were not put on, and some lace for her bosom lay with those trinkets, and with her handkerchief, and gloves, and some flowers, and a Prayer-book, all confusedly heaped about the looking-glass.

It was not in the first few moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed. But, I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone. Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress, that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could.

Then in just a few dramatic phrases the woman stands revealed.

"Look at me," said Miss Havisham. "You are not afraid of a woman who has never seen the sun since you were born?"

I regret to state that I was not afraid of telling the enormous lie comprehended in the answer "No."

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"Do you know what I touch here?" she said, laying her hands, one upon the other, on her left side.

"Yes, ma'am."

"What do I touch?"

"Your heart."

"Broken!"

She uttered the word with an eager look, and with strong emphasis, and with a weird smile that had a kind of boast in it. Afterwards, she kept her hands there for a little while, and slowly took them away as if they were heavy.

"I am tired," said Miss Havisham. "I want diversion, and I have done with men and women. Play."

Pip finds it difficult to "play" by himself before so strange and weird a lady, so Estella is sent for, and they play "beggar my neighbour," and during the game Estella is constantly insulting him.

It was then I began to understand that everything in the room had stopped, like the watch and the clock, a long time ago. I noticed that Miss Havisham put down the jewel exactly on the spot from which she had taken it up. As Estella dealt the cards, I glanced at the dressing-table again, and saw that the shoe upon it, once white, now yellow, had never been worn. I glanced down at the foot from which the shoe was absent, and saw that the silk stocking on it, once white, now yellow, had been trodden ragged. Without this arrest of everything, this standing-still of all the pale decayed objects, not even the withered bridal dress on the collapsed form could have looked so like grave-clothes, or the long veil so like a shroud.

So she sat, corpse-like, as we played at cards; the frillings and trimmings on her bridal dress, looking like earthy paper. I knew nothing then of the discoveries that are occasionally made of bodies buried in ancient times, which fall to powder in the moment of being dis-

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tinctly seen; but, I have often thought since, that she must have looked as if the admission of the natural light of day would have struck her to dust.

Here is a sample of Miss Havisham's training of, and pride in, Estella :

"You say nothing of her," remarked Miss Havisham to me, as she looked on. "She says many hard things of you, yet you say nothing of her. What do you think of her?"

"I don't like to say," I stammered.

"Tell me in my ear," said Miss Havisham, bending down.

"I think she is very proud," I replied, in a whisper.

"Anything else?"

"I think she is very pretty."

"Anything else?"

"I think she is very insulting." (She was looking at me then with a look of supreme aversion.)

"Anything else?"

"I think I should like to go home."

"And never see her again, though she is so pretty?"

"I am not sure that I shouldn't like to see her again, but I should like to go home now."

To such a pass had her craze for avenging her own wrongs, through Estella, come, that she could even take a pride in that beautiful, highly trained girl, insulting an ignorant village boy.

A STARTLER FOR UNCLE PUMBLEHOOK.

I really think that full justice would not be done to this sketch, if Pip's mendacious account of his visit to "Satis" House to Joe, his sister and Uncle Pumblechook, were omitted. Uncle Pumblechook was Pip's pet aversion; an aversion easily understood when the following was the usual manner in which he treated the boy:

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The miserable man was a man of that confined stolidity of mind, that he could not discuss my prospects without having me before him—as it were, to operate upon—and he would drag me up from my stool (usually by the collar) where I was quiet in a corner, and, putting me before the fire as if I were going to be cooked, would begin by saying, “Now, Mum (Joe’s wife—Joe being always ignored), here is this boy! Here is this boy which you brought up by hand. Hold up your head, boy, and be for ever grateful unto them which so did do. Now, Mum, with respections to this boy!” And then he would rumple my hair the wrong way—which from my earliest remembrance, as already hinted, I have in my soul denied the right of any fellow-creature to do—and would hold me before him by the sleeve: a spectacle of imbecility only to be equalled by himself.

On his return from this his first visit, Uncle Pumblechook so aggravated Pip that he told a highly coloured and wholly imaginary tale of what had transpired.

“Boy! What like is Miss Havisham?” Mr Pumblechook began, folding his arms tight on his chest.

“Very tall and dark,” I told him.

“Is she, uncle?” asked my sister.

Mr Pumblechook winked assent; from which I at once inferred that he had never seen Miss Havisham, for she was nothing of the kind.

“Good!” said Mr Pumblechook, conceitedly. (“This is the way to have him! We are beginning to hold our own, I think, Mum?”)

“I am sure, uncle,” returned Mrs Joe, “I wish you had him always; you know so well how to deal with him.”

“Now, boy! What was she a-doing of, when you went in to-day?” asked Mr Pumblechook.

“She was sitting,” I answered, “in a black velvet coach.”

Mr Pumblechook and Mrs Joe stared at one another—

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as they well might—and both repeated, “In a black velvet coach?”

“Yes,” said I. “And Miss Estella—that’s her niece, I think—handed her in cake and wine at the coach-window, on a gold plate. And we all had cake and wine on gold plates. And I got up behind the coach to eat mine, because she told me to.”

“Was anybody else there?” asked Mr Pumblechook.

“Four dogs,” said I.

“Large or small?”

“Immense,” said I. “And they fought for veal cutlets out of a silver basket.”

Mr Pumblechook and Mrs Joe stared at one another again, in utter amazement. I was perfectly frantic—a reckless witness under the torture—and would have told them anything.

“Where *was* this coach, in the name of gracious?” asked my sister.

“In Miss Havisham’s room.” They stared again. “But there wern’t any horses to it.” I added this saving clause, in the moment of rejecting four richly caparisoned coursers, which I had had wild thoughts of harnessing.

“Can this be possible, uncle?” asked Mrs Joe. “What can the boy mean?”

“I’ll tell you, Mum,” said Mr Pumblechook. “My opinion is, it’s a sedan-chair. She’s flighty, you know—very flighty—quite flighty enough to pass her days in a sedan-chair.”

“Did you ever see her in it, uncle?” asked Mrs Joe.

“How could I,” he returned, forced to the admission, “when I never see her in my life? Never clapped eyes upon her!”

“Goodness, uncle! And yet you have spoken to her?”

“Why, don’t you know,” said Mr Pumblechook, testily, “that when I have been there, I have been took up to the outside of her door, and the door has stood ajar, and she has spoken to me that way. Don’t say you don’t

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know *that*, Mum. Howsever, the boy went there to play. What did you play at, boy?"

"We played with flags," I said. (I beg to observe that I think of myself with amazement, when I recall the lies I told on this occasion.)

"Flags!" echoed my sister.

"Yes," said I. "Estella waved a blue flag, and I waved a red one, and Miss Havisham waved one sprinkled all over with little gold stars, out at the coach-window. And then we all waved our swords and hurrahed."

"Swords!" repeated my sister. "Where did you get swords from?"

"Out of a cupboard," said I. "And I saw pistols in it—and jam—and pills. And there was no daylight in the room, but it was all lighted up with candles."

"That's true, Mum," said Mr Pumblechook, with a grave nod. "That's the state of the case, for that much I've seen myself."

But he could not continue the deception to dear old Joe, and when they were alone confessed that the whole thing was a deception; to which Joe gravely replied:

"There's one thing you may be sure of, Pip—namely, that lies is lies. Howsever they come, they didn't ought to come, and they come from the father of lies, and work round to the same."

THE SECOND VISIT.

On the occasion of his next visit to "Satis" House, he meets and fights with a boy of his own age, whom he is destined afterwards to meet when his "great expectations" begin to be realised. At this time also he meets Miss Havisham's solicitor, who some years later is the bearer of the tidings of his good fortune.

This second visit happened on Miss Havisham's birthday. Her terrible state of mind may be gauged by this conversation:

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"On this day of the year, long before you were born, this heap of decay," stabbing with her crutched stick at the pile of cobwebs on the table but not touching it, "was brought here. It and I have worn away together. The mice have gnawed at it, and sharper teeth than teeth of mice have gnawed at me."

She held the head of her stick against her heart as she stood looking at the table; she in her once white dress, all yellow and withered; the once white cloth all yellow and withered; everything around in a state to crumble under a touch.

"When the ruin is complete," said she, with a ghastly look, "and when they lay me dead, in my bride's dress on the bride's table—which shall be done, and which will be the finished curse upon him—so much the better if it is done on this day!"

She stood looking at the table as if she stood looking at her own figure lying there. I remained quiet. Estella returned, and she too remained quiet. It seemed to me that we continued thus a long time. In the heavy air of the room, and the heavy darkness that brooded in its remoter corners, I even had an alarming fancy that Estella and I might presently begin to decay.

What a picture of dreary desolation is conjured up by these few words! What an experience for a boy and girl at their most impressionable age!

THE TALE OF THE TRAGEDY.

It is only years later, when Pip has begun to enjoy his good fortune, and is established at Barnard's Inn, that he hears the full story of the pitiful tragedy which so changed the life of Miss Havisham. The story is told by Herbert Pocket, Pip's reading companion, who turns out to be the boy whom Pip had fought and conquered at "Satis" House.

This is Herbert's story:

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"There appeared upon the scene a certain man, who made love to Miss Havisham. I never saw him (for this happened five-and-twenty years ago, before you and I were, Handel), but I have heard my father mention that he was a showy man, and the kind of man for the purpose. But that he was not to be, without ignorance or prejudice, mistaken for a gentleman, my father most strongly asseverates; because it is a principle of his that no man who was not a true gentleman at heart, ever was, since the world began, a true gentleman in manner. This man pursued Miss Havisham closely, and professed to be devoted to her. I believe she had not shown much susceptibility up to that time; but all the susceptibility she possessed, certainly came out then, and she passionately loved him. There is no doubt that she perfectly idolized him. He practised on her affection in that systematic way, that he got great sums of money from her, and he induced her to buy her brother out of a share in the brewery (which had been weakly left him by his father) at an immense price, on the plea that when he was her husband he must hold and manage it all.

"The marriage day was fixed, the wedding dresses were bought, the wedding tour was planned out, the wedding guests were invited. The day came, but not the bridegroom. He wrote a letter——"

"Which she received," I struck in, "when she was dressing for her marriage? At twenty minutes to nine?"

"At the hour and minute," said Herbert, nodding, "at which she afterwards stopped all the clocks. What was in it, further than that it most heartlessly broke the marriage off, I can't tell you, because I don't know. When she recovered from a bad illness that she had, she laid the whole place waste, as you have seen it, and she has never since looked upon the light of day."

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MISS HAVISHAM'S IDEA OF REAL LOVE.

See we now Pip, in the enjoyment of a good income, occupying chambers in Town, well-dressed and well-educated; the village lad turned into the semblance of a gentleman.

A message reaches him that Estella, who has been away from "Satis" House, finishing her education, has now returned there and that a visit from Pip will be welcome. He at once takes the journey, and when he sees Estella she is so changed, so much more beautiful—so much more womanly—that at first he does not recognise her. Then when she leaves the room Miss Havisham asks :

"Is she beautiful, graceful, well-grown? Do you admire her?"

"Everybody must who sees her, Miss Havisham."

She drew an arm round my neck, and drew my head close down to hers as she sat in the chair. "Love her, love her, love her! How does she use you?"

Before I could answer (if I could have answered so difficult a question at all), she repeated, "Love her, love her, love her! If she favours you, love her. If she wounds you, love her. If she tears your heart to pieces—and as it gets older and stronger it will tear deeper—love her, love her, love her!"

Never had I seen such passionate eagerness as was joined to her utterance of these words. I could feel the muscles of the thin arm round my neck, swell with the vehemence that possessed her.

"Hear me, Pip! I adopted her to be loved. I bred her and educated her, to be loved. I developed her into what she is, that she might be loved. Love her!"

She said the word often enough, and there could be no doubt that she meant to say it; but if the often repeated word had been hate instead of love—despair—revenge—dire death—it could not have sounded from her lips more like a curse.

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"I'll tell you," said she, in the same hurried, passionate whisper, "what real love is. It is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter—as I did!"

When she came to that, and to a wild cry that followed that, I caught her round the waist. For she rose up in the chair, in her shroud of a dress, and struck at the air as if she would as soon have struck herself against the wall and fallen dead.

Poor, poor lady! What mad schemes ran riot in her seared brain! Let Estella's life's happiness be ruined, let Pip despair in a hopeless passion, so long as her fantastic scheme of revenge can be accomplished. And at this time neither Estella nor Pip had come of age.

A REPROACH AND A DECLARATION.

Pip eventually discovers that the person to whom he owes his fortune is not Miss Havisham, but the convict who had frightened him in the churchyard and who, at the peril of his life, had returned without leave from transportation. Pip therefore journeys to "Satis" House for the purpose of telling Miss Havisham of his discovery. Estella is present at the interview.

It is a sadly disillusioned Pip who opens the conversation by saying :

"I am as unhappy as you can ever have meant me to be. I have found out who my patron is. It is not a fortunate discovery, and is not likely ever to enrich me in reputation, station, fortune, anything. There are reasons why I must say no more of that. It is not my secret, but another's. . . . When you first caused me to be brought here, Miss Havisham; when I belonged to the village over yonder, that I wish I had never left; I suppose I did really come here, as any other chance boy might have

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come—as a kind of servant, to gratify a want or a whim, and to be paid for it? When I fell into the mistake I have so long remained in” (of supposing her to be his benefactress), “at least you led me on?” said I.

“Yes,” she returned, again nodding steadily, “I let you go on.”

“Was that kind?”

“Who am I,” cried Miss Havisham, striking her stick upon the floor and flashing into wrath so suddenly that Estella glanced up at her in surprise, “who am I, for God’s sake, that I should be kind?”

“I was liberally paid for my old attendance here,” I said, to soothe her, “in being apprenticed, and I have asked these questions only for my own information. What follows has another (and I hope more disinterested) purpose. In humouring my mistake, Miss Havisham, you punished—practised on—perhaps you will supply whatever term expresses your intention, without offence—your self-seeking relations?”

“I did. Why, they would have it so! So would you. What has been my history, that I should be at the pains of entreating either them or you not to have it so! You made your own snares. I never made them.”

Then turning to Estella he said :

“You know I love you. You know that I have loved you long and dearly. I should have said this sooner, but for my long mistake. It induced me to hope that Miss Havisham meant us for one another. While I thought you could not help yourself, as it were, I refrained from saying it. But I must say it now. . . . I know I have no hope that I shall ever call you mine, Estella. I am ignorant what may become of me very soon, how poor I may be, or where I may go. Still, I love you. I have loved you ever since I first saw you in this house. . . . It would have been cruel in Miss Havisham, horribly cruel, to practise on the susceptibility of a poor boy, and to tor-

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ture me through all these years with a vain hope and an idle pursuit, if she had reflected on the gravity of what she did. But I think she did not. I think that in the endurance of her own trial, she forgot mine, Estella."

I saw Miss Havisham put her hand to her heart and hold it there, as she sat looking by turns at Estella and at me.

"It seems," said Estella, very calmly, "that there are sentiments, fancies—I don't know how to call them—which I am not able to comprehend. When you say you love me, I know what you mean, as a form of words; but nothing more. You address nothing in my breast, you touch nothing there. I don't care for what you say at all. I have tried to warn you of this; now, have I not?"

REMORSE AND REPENTANCE.

This interview is not without its effect on the hermit of "Satis" House, for at a subsequent interview she says to Pip, handing him her Tablets:

"My name is on the first leaf. If you can ever write under my name, 'I forgive her,' though ever so long after my broken heart is dust—pray do it!"

And then, to his surprise and terror, she drops on her knees at his feet with her folded hands raised to him in the manner in which when her poor heart was young and fresh and whole they must often have been raised to Heaven from her mother's side, crying out:

"What have I done! What have I done!" She wrung her hands, and crushed her white hair, and returned to this cry over and over again. "What have I done!"

I knew not how to answer, or how to comfort her. That she had done a grievous thing in taking an impressionable child to mould into the form that her wild resentment, spurned affection, and wounded pride, found

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vengeance in, I knew full well. But that, in shutting out the light of day, she had shut out infinitely more; that, in seclusion, she had secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences; that, her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do and must and will that reverse the appointed order of their Maker; I knew equally well. And could I look upon her without compassion, seeing her punishment in the ruin she was, in her profound unfitness for this earth on which she was placed, in the vanity of sorrow which had become a master mania, like the vanity of penitence, the vanity of remorse, the vanity of unworthiness, and other monstrous vanities that have been curses in this world?

"Until you spoke to her the other day, and until I saw in you a looking-glass that showed me what I once felt myself, I did not know what I had done. What have I done! What have I done!" And so again, twenty, fifty times over, What had she done!

In the agony of her remorse she confesses to Pip that when Estella first came to her, "I meant to save her from misery like my own."

"But as she grew, and promised to be very beautiful, I gradually did worse, and with my praises, and with my jewels, and with my teachings, and with this figure of myself always before her, a warning to back and point my lessons, I stole her heart away and put ice in its place."

DEATH PAYS ALL.

Pip leaves her; but on reaching the gate has a fancy to go back and look in at her room and assure himself that she is safe and well.

I looked into the room where I had left her, and I saw her seated in the ragged chair upon the hearth close to the fire, with her back towards me. In the moment when I was withdrawing my head to go quietly away, I saw a great flaming light spring up. In the same moment I saw

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her running at me, shrieking, with a whirl of fire blazing all about her, and soaring at least as many feet above her head as she was high.

Pip succeeds in extinguishing the flames that threaten to consume her; and when the surgeon comes, her bed is laid upon the great table which contains the mouldering remains of the bridal feast, where she had said she would lie one day.

Though every vestige of her dress was burnt, as they told me, she still had something of her old ghastly bridal appearance; for, they had covered her to the throat with white cotton-wool, and as she lay with a white sheet loosely overlying that, the phantom air of something that had been and was changed was still upon her. . . .

There was a stage, that evening, when she spoke collectedly of what had happened, though with a certain terrible vivacity. Towards midnight she began to wander in her speech, and after that it gradually set in that she said innumerable times in a low solemn voice, "What have I done!" And then, "When she first came, I meant to save her from misery like mine." And then, "Take the pencil and write under my name, 'I forgive her!'" . . .

At about six o'clock of the morning, therefore, I leaned over her and touched her lips with mine, just as they said, not stopping for being touched, "Take the pencil and write under my name, 'I forgive her.'"

That is the end of Miss Havisham; for she died shortly afterwards. How merciful, how tender, how much in accord with the dictates of his own tender and merciful heart, was it of Dickens to let her tired, worn body go to its eternal rest so soon as she had realised the futility of her scheme of vengeance and repented of the effects it had had upon her innocent victims! To such distress, to such mental agony, to such a living death, we can all extend the divine gift of compassion, and over her grave murmur the words "Rest in peace."

IV

THE MARCHIONESS.

(From *The Old Curiosity Shop*)

EXPLANATION OF CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN THIS SKETCH.

Brass, Sampson—Attorney.

Brass, Sally—His sister.

Codlin, Thomas—"Punch" showman.

Garland, Mr—Retired gentleman.

Jarley, Mrs—Proprietress of wax-work show.

Marchioness, The—Servant to the Brasses.

Nubbles, Kit—Servant to Little Nell, afterwards to Mr Garland.

Quilp, Daniel—Dwarf and chief client of the Brasses.

Swiveller, Richard—Clerk to Sampson Brass.

Trent, Fred—Brother to Little Nell and friend of Swiveller.

Trent, Nelly (Little Nell)—The heroine of the story.

Trent, Mr—Little Nell's grandfather.

Witherden, Mr—Notary and friend of Mr Garland.

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Early in 1840, *Pickwick Papers* and *Nicholas Nickleby* having been such great successes, Dickens thought he could carry his reading public with him in a new venture called *Master Humphrey's Clock*. This was to consist mostly of detached papers, but to include one serial story. Unfortunately the first three numbers did not contain the beginning of any serial story, and the public did not take to the new publication. They were not to be cajoled even by the magic of Dickens's name—unless he gave them a serial. So with the fourth number *The Old Curiosity Shop* was started; and when that was finished—to use the author's own words: "*Master Humphrey's Clock* became one of the lost books of the earth." Although, however, this magazine did not catch on, and although, as Dickens ruefully said, it "became the property of the trunkmaker and the butterman," the detached papers have been rescued from an unmerited oblivion and find a place to-day in complete editions of Dickens's works.

No matter how he might strive to focus the whole interest of his readers upon the central figure in which he himself was most interested, Dickens's bubbling, seething fancy would not suffer restraint; and many of his characters who have little or no direct bearing on the final development of the plot, assume, by a happy phrase, or a humorous incident, a high place in the hierarchy of his immortal creations.

I will take two instances of this from *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Thomas Codlin, the disgruntled, pessimistic Punch and Judy showman, and Mrs Jarley of "wax-work" fame.* By one phrase Codlin leaps into immortality: "Codlin's the friend, not Short." That is the phrase he reiterates to Little Nell when he discovers that enquiries are being made concerning her which may mean money.

* See page 338.

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And it is to Codlin that we owe this delightful incident—one of those incidents connected with food, in which Dickens's fancy (for he loved eatable things to eat and drinkable things to drink) revelled.

On a wet afternoon Codlin found himself at the "Jolly Sandboys," in the kitchen of which was the landlord, seated before a glorious fire, on which stood a large cauldron emitting a most appetising smell. What a description of the landlord! "The glow of the fire was upon his bald head, upon his twinkling eye, upon his watering mouth, upon his pimpled face, upon his round fat figure." Mr Codlin could not restrain himself, so, drawing his hand across his mouth, he murmured anxiously: "What is it?"

The lowly and poor have their *gourmets* as well as the highly placed and wealthy. Listen to the landlord's reply, accompanied by an emphasizing smacking of the lips:

"It's a stew of tripe," said the landlord, smacking his lips, "and cow-heel," smacking them again, "and bacon," smacking them once more, "and steak," smacking them for the fourth time, "and peas, cauliflowers, new potatoes, and sparrow-grass, all working up together in one delicious gravy." Having come to the climax, he smacked his lips a great many times, and taking a long hearty sniff of the fragrance that was hovering about, put on the cover again with the air of one whose toils on earth were over.

Codlin is almost overcome at this description of the feast in store; for he asks faintly: "At what time will it be ready?" And on hearing the time he says, with gastronomic emphasis: "Then fetch me a pint of warm ale, and don't let nobody bring into the room even so much as a biscuit till the time arrives."

Thank you, Codlin, for introducing to us that savoury dish—the very reading of which on a cold day is hunger-provoking. May you, in the Elysian Fields, find ambrosia half as tempting.

Of the male characters, necessary to the proper develop-

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ment of the story, one stands out alone, rearing his height above the rest like Gulliver among the Lilliputians. This is Dick Swiveller. More amusing than Mantalini, not nearly so grotesque, in point of interest, he is *primus inter pares* with Micawber, to whom he bears a strong resemblance; both are good-natured, both are hopelessly impecunious, both indulge in extravagant and high-falutin language, and both are the means by which villainy is unmasked. Perhaps Micawber, as the later creation, is the more finished production; but Dick, frankly careless, perpetual grand-master of the Glorious Apollos (I wonder which Secret Society Dickens has a sly thrust at here), his speech crammed with "sentiments" and "toasts," so humorous, so splendidly human, so compassionate in his quaint cultivation of the Brass's drudge—the Marchioness—makes more appeal to me than does Micawber.

Who would not have loved to be present at the repast he gives to his friend Frederick Trent, Nell's ne'er-do-well brother, at his apartments in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane?

"May the present moment," said Dick, sticking his fork into a large carbuncular potatoe, "be the worst of our lives! I like this plan of sending 'em with the peel on; there's a charm in drawing a potatoe from its native element (if I may so express it) to which the rich and powerful are strangers. Ah! 'Man wants but little here below, nor wants that little long!' How true that is!—after dinner."

See how the careless, moneyless, Dick becomes amusingly careful and business-like. The dinner has been obtained on credit, and Dick makes an entry in a greasy memorandum book; explaining thus:

"I enter in this little book the names of the streets that I can't go down while the shops are open. This dinner to-day closes Long Acre. I bought a pair of boots in

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Great Queen Street last week, and made that no thoroughfare too. There's only one avenue to the Strand left open now, and I shall have to stop up that to-night with a pair of gloves. The roads are closing so fast in every direction, that in about a month's time, unless my aunt sends me a remittance, I shall have to go three or four miles out of town to get over the way."

G. K. Chesterton in his *Charles Dickens* goes all out for Dick Swiveller—"perhaps the noblest of all the noble creations of Dickens." Mr Frank T. Marzials, in his *Life of Charles Dickens*, describes Dick as "the questionable hero"—and that is all he says about him. Mr A. W. Ward in his *Dickens* says that Swiveller "ends by endearing himself to the most thoughtless laughter. Dick Swiveller and his *protégée* have gained a lasting place among the favourite characters of English fiction"; while Mr J. Walker McSpadden in his *Synopses of Dickens's Novels*, after dealing with other characters says: "Notice should be taken of . . . Richard Swiveller, soldier of fortune, and the Marchioness, who saved his life and thereby procured for herself a husband."

So diversely does one character appeal to different minds.

It is because I take the view I have described of Dick, it is because his fortunes are inextricably mixed with those of the Marchioness, that I have chosen the latter as the subject of my sketch. It may seem that to deal with *The Old Curiosity Shop* and not to give first place to Little Nell, is akin to playing Hamlet minus the Prince of Denmark. But there is reason in roasted eggs, and I have a reason for my selection; that is that the Marchioness appeals more strongly to me than does Little Nell, because she is the direct means by which the arch-conspirators, Sampson and Sally Brass, and Quilp, are brought to justice and punishment.

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A BRAZEN PAIR.

Dick Swiveller, by the good offices of Quilp, has become clerk in the office of Sampson Brass, solicitor, of Bevis Marks. The lawyer and his sweet sister, Sally, live on the premises, which are described as a small dark house, so close upon the foot-way that a passenger who takes the wall brushes the dim glass of the office with his coat sleeve.

We have a fine pen-picture of Sally Brass :

In complexion Miss Brass was sallow—rather a dirty sallow, so to speak—but this hue was agreeably relieved by the healthy glow which mantled in the extreme tip of her laughing nose. Her voice was exceedingly impressive—deep and rich in quality, and, once heard, not easily forgotten. Her usual dress was a green gown, in colour not unlike the curtain of the office window, made tight to the figure, and terminating at the throat, where it was fastened behind by a peculiarly large and massive button. Feeling, no doubt, that simplicity and plainness are the soul of elegance, Miss Brass wore no collar or kerchief except upon her head, which was invariably ornamented with a brown gauze scarf, like the wing of the fabled vampire, and which, twisted into any form that happened to suggest itself, formed an easy and graceful head-dress.

Now if we take a look at her brother, we shall the better appreciate what Dick thinks of his new surroundings :

This Brass was an attorney of no very good repute, from Bevis Marks in the city of London; he was a tall, meagre man, with a nose like a wen, a protruding forehead, retreating eyes, and hair of a deep red. He wore a long back surtout reaching nearly to his ancles, short black trousers, high shoes, and cotton stockings of a bluish grey. He had a cringing manner, but a very harsh voice; and his blandest smiles were so extremely forbidding, that to have had his company under the least

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repulsive circumstances, one would have wished him to be out of temper that he might only scowl.

Dick is a firm believer in fate, or destiny; so he accepts all the mutations of fortune with the phlegmatic stoicism of a Turk. After soliloquising that he is clerk to Brass—also to Brass's sister—whom he describes as a "female dragon"—he proceeds musingly, addressing his remarks to the ceiling :

"Quilp offers me this place, which he says he can insure me. Fred, who, I could have taken my affidavit, would not have heard of such a thing, backs Quilp to my astonishment, and urges me to take it also—staggerer, number one. My aunt in the country stops the supplies, and writes an affectionate note to say that she has made a new will, and left me out of it—staggerer, number two. No money; no credit; no support from Fred, who seems to turn steady all at once; notice to quit the old lodgings—staggerers, three, four, five, and six! Under an accumulation of staggerers, no man can be considered a free agent. No man knocks himself down; if his destiny knocks him down, his destiny must pick him up again. Then I'm very glad that mine has brought all this upon itself, and I shall be as careless as I can, and make myself quite at home to spite it. So go on my buck," said Mr Swiveller, taking his leave of the ceiling with a significant nod, "and let us see which of us will be tired first!"

But destiny plays a far larger part in placing Dick in Bevis Marks than he imagines; for it brings him into direct touch with the drudge, whom in his lofty style he christens "the Marchioness"—a combination which ultimately is fatal to the machinations of Quilp and the Brasses.

ENTER THE MARCHIONESS.

And his introduction to the Marchioness is brought about by the grandfather's younger brother, who after an absence from England of many years has returned to find his elder

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brother and Little Nell to share his prosperity. He has taken lodgings at Bevis Marks in the hope that by some strange chance he may obtain information as to their whereabouts, which he has hitherto failed to obtain.

This is how he takes up his abode at the Brass residence—that event coinciding with Dick's first day's experience of the attorney's office. Dick was busily engaged in drawing caricatures of Sally Brass,

. . . when a coach stopped near the door, and presently afterwards there was a loud double-knock. As this was no business of Mr Swiveller's, the person not ringing the office bell, he pursued his diversion with perfect composure, notwithstanding that he rather thought there was nobody else in the house.

In this, however, he was mistaken; for, after the knock had been repeated with increased impatience, the door was opened, and somebody with a very heavy tread went up the stairs and into the room above. Mr Swiveller was wondering whether this might be another Miss Brass, twin sister to the Dragon, when there came a rapping of knuckles at the office door.

"Come in!" said Dick. "Don't stand upon ceremony. The business will get rather complicated if I've many more customers. Come in!"

"Oh, please," said a little voice very low down in the doorway, "will you come and show the lodgings?"

Dick leant over the table, and descried a small slipshod girl in a dirty coarse apron and bib, which left nothing of her visible but her face and feet. She might as well have been dressed in a violin-case.

"Why, who are you?" said Dick.

To which the only reply was, "Oh, please will you come and show the lodgings?"

There never was such an old-fashioned child in her looks and manner. She must have been at work from her cradle. She seemed as much afraid of Dick, as Dick was amazed at her.

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"I haven't got anything to do with the lodgings," said Dick. "Tell 'em to call again."

"Oh, but please will you come and show the lodgings," returned the girl; "it's eighteen shillings a week and us finding plate and linen. Boots and clothes is extra, and fires in winter-time is eightpence a day."

"Why don't you show 'em yourself? You seem to know all about 'em," said Dick.

"Miss Sally said I wasn't to, because people wouldn't believe the attendance was good if they saw how small I was first."

Thus were the first links forged in that chain of circumstance destined to send the real criminals to shameful death or shameful imprisonment, to release the innocent, and to bring happiness to the strangely assorted pair themselves.

WHO WAS THE MARCHIONESS?

A little digression may be pardoned here. Who was this little drudge—the Marchioness?

G. K. Chesterton in his wonder book *Charles Dickens*, puts forward the fantastic theory that "those grisly figures, Mrs Chadband (*Bleak House*) and Mrs Clennam (*Little Dorrit*), Miss Havisham (*Great Expectations*), Miss Flite and Nemo (*Bleak House*) and Sally Brass were keeping something back from the author as well as from the reader," and goes on to suggest regarding Sally Brass that "something worse was whispered by the misshapen Quilp to the sinister Sally in that wild wet summer-house by the river; something worse than the clumsy plot against the clumsy Kit."

I have said "fantastic"; perhaps I should have said "daring." Maybe it is a bit of both to suggest that the creator of the characters, the only one who knows the inmost thoughts of the children of his brain, is ignorant of something that they alone know. Fantastic, or daring, or both, the idea is intriguing so far as *The Old Curiosity Shop*

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is concerned, because Dickens twice hints at some mystery connected with the Marchioness.

QUILP IS ANSWERED.

The first hint is found when Quilp has gone to Bevis Marks to invite Sampson and Sally Brass to take tea with him in that "wild wet summer-house by the river." Neither are in—nor is Dick; Quilp tells the Marchioness, who opens the door, that he will write a note, and pushes past her into the office :

As Mr Quilp folded his note (which was soon written : being a very short one) he encountered the gaze of the small servant. He looked at her, long and earnestly.

"How are you?" said the dwarf, moistening a wafer with horrible grimaces.

The small servant, perhaps frightened by his looks, returned no audible reply; but it appeared from the motion of her lips that she was inwardly repeating the same form of expression concerning the note or message.

"Do they use you ill here? is your mistress a Tartar?" said Quilp with a chuckle.

In reply to the last interrogation, the small servant, with a look of infinite cunning mingled with fear, screwed up her mouth very tight and round, and nodded violently.

Whether there was anything in the peculiar slyness of her action which fascinated Mr Quilp, or anything in the expression of her features at the moment which attracted his attention for some other reason; or whether it merely occurred to him as a pleasant whim to stare the small servant out of countenance; certain it is, that he planted his elbows square and firmly on the desk, and squeezing up his cheeks with his hands, looked at her fixedly.

"Where do you come from?" he said after a long pause, stroking his chin.

"I don't know."

"What's your name?"

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"Nothing."

"Nonsense!" retorted Quilp. "What does your mistress call you when she wants you?"

"A little devil," said the child.

She added in the same breath, as if fearful of any further questioning, "But please will you leave a card or message?"

These unusual answers might naturally have provoked some more inquiries. Quilp, however, without uttering another word, withdrew his eyes from the small servant, stroked his chin more thoughtfully than before, and then, bending over the note as if to direct it with scrupulous and hair-breadth nicety, looked at her, covertly but very narrowly, from under his bushy eyebrows. The result of this secret survey was, that he shaded his face with his hands, and laughed slyly and noiselessly, until every vein in it was smollen almost to bursting. Pulling his hat over his brow to conceal his mirth and its effects, he tossed the letter to the child, and hastily withdrew.

WHAT IS THE SECRET?

Obviously this is the first time Quilp has seen the drudge. Whence this abnormal curiosity? Whom does she so much resemble that he should so laugh? And why does Dickens add:

Once in the street, moved by some secret impulse, he laughed, and held his sides, and laughed again, and tried to peer through the dusty area railings as if to catch another glimpse of the child, until he was quite tired out.?

He then proceeds to the "wild wet summer-house by the river" for the tea-party with the lawyer and his sister. And the only phrase about the "secret" to which Chesterton alludes is:

"Business," said the dwarf, glancing from brother to

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sister. "Very private business. Lay your heads together when you're by yourselves."

Then he instructs them to devise some means of putting Kit away. And they agree. But no word of any other secret; and the secret of the birth of the Marchioness is buried under that plain slab in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

THE MARCHIONESS DINES.

But the concatenation of circumstances—designed, I think, and not chance—gives an idea of what may have been in Dickens's mind—a more than ordinary relationship between the Marchioness and Sally Brass. A curious light is thrown on this hypothesis by the incident in which Dick, interested strongly in the Marchioness, believing that she is half-starved or worse—follows Sally one day down into the horrible basement in which the poor little thing lives her wretched life. And this incident occurs sometime before Quilp appears to have made his mysterious discovery.

First peeping over the handrail and allowing the head-dress to disappear in the darkness below, he groped his way down, and arrived at the door of a back kitchen immediately after Miss Brass had entered the same, bearing in her hand a cold leg of mutton. It was a very dark miserable place, very low and very damp: the walls disfigured by a thousand rents and blotches. The water was trickling out of a leaky butt, and a most wretched cat was lapping up the drops with the sickly eagerness of starvation. The grate, which was a wide one, was wound and screwed up tight, so as to hold no more than a little thin sandwich of fire. Everything was locked up; the coal-cellar, the candle-box, the salt-box, the meat-safe, were all padlocked. There was nothing that a beetle could have lunched upon. The pinched and meagre aspect of the place would have killed a chameleon: he would have known, at the first mouthful, that the air was not eatable, and must have given up the ghost in despair.

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The small servant stood with humility in presence of Miss Sally, and hung her head.

"Are you there?" said Miss Sally.

"Yes, ma'am," was the answer in a weak voice.

"Go further away from the leg of mutton, or you'll be picking it, I know," said Miss Sally.

The girl withdrew into a corner, while Miss Brass took a key from her pocket, and opening the safe, brought from it a dreary waste of cold potatoes, looking as eatable as Stonehenge. This she placed before the small servant, ordering her to sit down before it, and then, taking up a great carving-knife, made a mighty show of sharpening it upon the carving-fork.

"Do you see this?" said Miss Brass, slicing off about two square inches of cold mutton, after all this preparation, and holding it out on the point of the fork.

The small servant looked hard enough at it with her hungry eyes to see every shred of it, small as it was, and answered, "yes."

"Then don't you ever go and say," retorted Miss Sally, "that you hadn't meat here. There, eat it up."

This was soon done. "Now, do you want any more?" said Miss Sally.

The hungry creature answered with a faint "No." They were evidently going through an established form.

"You've been helped once to meat," said Miss Brass, summing up the facts; "you have had as much as you can eat, you're asked if you want any more, and you answer 'no!' Then don't you ever go and say you were allowanced, mind that."

With those words, Miss Sally put the meat away and locked the safe, and then drawing near to the small servant, overlooked her while she finished the potatoes.

Then follows this extremely curious and apparently inexplicable incident :

It was plain that some extraordinary grudge was working in Miss Brass's gentle breast, and that it was that

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which impelled her, without the smallest present cause, to rap the child with the blade of the knife, now on her hand, now on her head, and now on her back, as if she found it quite impossible to stand so close to her without administering a few slight knocks. But Mr Swiveller was not a little surprised to see his fellow-clerk, after walking slowly backwards towards the door, as if she were trying to withdraw herself from the room but could not accomplish it, dart suddenly forward, and falling on the small servant give her some hard blows with her clenched hand. The victim cried, but in a subdued manner as if she feared to raise her voice, and Miss Sally, comforting herself with a pinch of snuff, ascended the stairs, just as Richard had safely reached the office.

Why this insensate fury? Why this maleficent hatred, expressing itself in such brutal violence?

My theory is that Quilp in his close inspection of the drudge discovered more than an ordinary likeness to someone he knew. Whom? Who is he going to meet that afternoon? Sally Brass? And if, at that gruesome feast to the lawyer and his sister which immediately follows, he whispers to them some other secret in addition to the plot to entrap Kit, it is that he has discovered Sally's secret.

But it will be said: Would a mother beat her child with such wanton cruelty as that which Sally meted out to the Marchioness? The hymn says: "Can a woman's tender care, cease towards the child she bare? Yes! she may forgetful be." And the annals of our criminal courts teem with examples of ferocious cruelty of mothers to their children. Sally Brass was of that mould of woman who would not scruple to visit upon the head of her unfortunate offspring—a perpetual reminder of her lapse—all the chagrin and contempt she felt for her own weakness.

There are just two more pointers which have helped me to arrive at this conclusion as to the parentage of the Marchioness.

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SALLY IS SURPRISED.

Here is the first pointer : The *penchant* of the Marchioness for spying through keyholes has the happiest results, for by it she is enabled to relate to Dick how Sally and Sampson Brass have woven the plot which sends Kit Nubbles to gaol. Dick, who is very weak after a serious illness, in which he has been nursed by the Marchioness, escaped from the Brasses (as will be subsequently related) at once sends her to a notary, Mr Witherden, who acts for Mr Garland, Kit's employer and benefactor. Upon hearing her story, the notary makes an appointment with Sally, and this conversation takes place :

"Miss Brass, we professional people understand each other, and, when we choose, can say what we have to say, in a very few words. You advertised for a runaway servant, the other day?"

"Well," returned Miss Sally, *with a sudden flush overspreading her features*, "what of that?"

"She is found, ma'am," said the Notary, pulling out his pocket-handkerchief with a flourish. "She is found."

"Who found her?" demanded Sally hastily.

"We did, ma'am. Only last night, or you would have heard from us before."

"And now I *have* heard from you," said Miss Brass, folding her arms *as though she were about to deny something to the death*, "what have you got to say? Something you have got into your heads about her, of course. Prove it, will you—that's all. Prove it. You have found her, you say. I can tell you (if you don't know it) that you have found the most artful, lying, pilfering, devilish little minx that was ever born.—Have you got her here?" she added, looking sharply round.

"No, she is not here at present," returned the Notary. "But she is quite safe."

"Ha!" cried Sally, twitching a pinch of snuff out of her box, as spitefully as if she were in the very act of

wrenching off the small servant's nose; "she shall be safe enough from this time, I warrant you."

"I hope so," replied the Notary.—"Did it occur to you for the first time, when you found she had run away, that there were two keys to your kitchen door?"

Miss Sally took another pinch, and putting her head on one side, looked at her questioner, with a curious kind of spasm about her mouth, but with a cunning aspect of immense expression.

"Two keys," repeated the Notary; "one of which gave her the opportunities of roaming through the house at nights when you supposed her fast locked up, and of overhearing confidential consultations—among others, that particular conference, to be described to-day before a justice, which you will have an opportunity of hearing her relate; that conference which you and Mr Brass held together, on the night before that most unfortunate and innocent young man was accused of robbery, by a horrible device of which I will only say that it may be characterised by the epithets which you have applied to this wretched little witness, and by a few stronger ones besides."

Sally took another pinch. Although her face was wonderfully composed, *it was apparent that she was wholly taken by surprise, and that what she had expected to be taxed with, in connection with her small servant, was something very different from this.*

"As though she were about to deny something to the death." What does she suspect? Certainly not that the poor drudge has had the wit to spy upon her and listen. "Prove it"! What?

Again, "what she expected to be taxed with in connection with her small servant was something very different from this." What does she expect to hear? The notary cannot possibly know of any secret connected with "the small servant's" birth. It is Sally's guilty mind that makes her expect "to be taxed with something very different."

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SOPHRONIA SPHYNX.

The second pointer is contained in the last chapter. Dick Swiveller has been left a legacy of £150 per annum; and in accordance with a vow he has made when ill, he sends the Marchioness to a good school for six years—at an expense which all that time kept him in straitened circumstances—and rechristens her Sophronia Sphynx. At the end of that time he marries her, and rents a cottage at Hampstead “with a smoking box in its garden”; and then follows a paragraph which I may properly call in aid as binding together the links to which reference has been made.

Mr Swiveller, having always been in some measure of a philosophic and reflective turn, grew immensely contemplative, at times, in the smoking-box, and was accustomed at such periods to debate in his own mind the mysterious question of Sophronia's parentage. Sophronia herself supposed she was an orphan; *but Mr Swiveller, putting various slight circumstances together, often thought Miss Brass must know better than that; and, having heard from his wife of her strange interview with Quilp, entertained sundry misgivings whether that person, in his lifetime, might not also have been able to solve the riddle, had he chosen.*

Now to return to the narrative, and show how Dick, the happy-go-lucky, early in his career as clerk to Sampson Brass, secured the affectionate gratitude of this apparently insignificant “slavey.”

DICK SUPS WITH THE MARCHIONESS.

Richard Swiveller, finding time hanging heavily on his hands in the Brass's office, provides himself with a cribbage board and a pack of cards, and, playing with a dummy, backs himself for large sums of money. One evening when so engaged, his employers being absent, he sees an eye

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glistening at the keyhole, and discovers it to be that of the Marchioness; and she admits she has been so watching him ever since he started playing cards, "for company." Ascertaining that there is a fire in the basement—"only a small one"—and that the young lady can "do" with some bread and beef, also that she once only has had a sip of beer, he orders beef, bread and purl (hot spiced ale) and watches with much gratification her enjoyment of these good things, assisting himself in the consumption of the purl. He then proceeds to instruct her in the mysteries of Crib, which she speedily learns, being both sharp-witted and cunning. Then occurs the following dialogue:

"I suppose," said Dick, "that they consult together, a good deal, and talk about a great many people—about me for instance, sometimes, eh, Marchioness?"

The Marchioness nodded amazingly.

"Complimentary?" said Mr Swiveller.

The Marchioness changed the motion of her head, which had not yet left off nodding, and suddenly began to shake it from side to side, with a vehemence which threatened to dislocate her neck.

"Humph!" Dick muttered. "Would it be any breach of confidence, Marchioness, to relate what they say of the humble individual who has now the honour to—?"

"Miss Sally says you're a funny chap," replied his friend.

"Well, Marchioness," said Mr Swiveller, "that's not uncomplimentary. Merriment, Marchioness, is not a bad or a degrading quality. Old King Cole was himself a merry old soul, if we may put any faith in the pages of history."

"But she says," pursued his companion, "that you ain't to be trusted."

"Why, really Marchioness," said Mr Swiveller, thoughtfully; "several ladies and gentlemen—not exactly professional persons, but tradespeople, ma'am, tradespeople—have made the same remark. The obscure citizen

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who keeps the hotel over the way, inclined strongly to that opinion to-night when I ordered him to prepare the banquet. It's a popular prejudice, Marchioness; and yet I am sure I don't know why, for I have been trusted in my time to a considerable amount, and I can safely say that I never forsook my trust until it deserted me—never. Mr Brass is of the same opinion, I suppose?"

His friend nodded again, with a cunning look which seemed to hint that Mr Brass held stronger opinions on the subject than his sister; and seeming to recollect herself, added imploringly, "But don't you ever tell upon me, or I shall be beat to death."

"Marchioness," said Mr Swiveller, rising, "the word of a gentleman is as good as his bond—sometimes better, as in the present case, where his bond might prove but a doubtful sort of security. I am your friend, and I hope we shall play many more rubbers together in this same saloon. But, Marchioness," added Richard, stopping in his way to the door, and wheeling slowly round upon the small servant, who was following with the candle; "it occurs to me that you must be in the constant habit of airing your eye at keyholes, to know all this."

"I only wanted," replied the trembling Marchioness, "to know where the key of the safe was hid; that was all; and I wouldn't have taken much, if I had found it—only enough to quench my hunger."

"You didn't find it then?" said Dick. "But of course you didn't, or you'd be plumper. Good night, Marchioness. Fare thee well, and if for ever, then for ever fare thee well—and put up the chain, Marchioness, in case of accidents."

DICK MUSES ON DESTINY.

"This Marchioness is a very extraordinary person—surrounded by mysteries, ignorant of the taste of beer, unacquainted with her own name (which is less remarkable), and taking a limited view of society through the

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keyholes of doors—can these things be her destiny, or has some unknown person started an opposition to the decrees of fate? It is a most inscrutable and unmitigated staggerer."

THE MARCHIONESS NURSES DICK.

Shortly after this episode the plot against Kit materialises, and, on the perjured evidence of Brass, he is found guilty of stealing a £5 note and sentenced to transportation. Quilp then instructs Brass to get rid of Dick—which is done. Dick leaves the office with his big heart full of good designs for the comfort of Kit's mother and for the aid of Kit himself; but at that moment he is stricken down with a violent fever, from which, after a deep dreamless sleep, he awakes to find—what?

. . . The Marchioness playing cribbage with herself at the table. There she sat, intent upon her game, coughing now and then in a subdued manner as if she feared to disturb him—shuffling the cards, cutting, dealing, playing, counting, pegging—going through all the mysteries of cribbage as if she had been in full practice from her cradle!

"I'm dreaming," thought Richard, "that's clear. When I went to bed, my hands were not made of egg-shells; and now I can almost see through 'em. If this is not a dream, I have woke up, by mistake, in an Arabian Night, instead of a London one. But I have no doubt I'm asleep. Not the least."

Here the small servant had another cough.

"Very remarkable!" thought Mr Swiveller. "I never dreamt such a real cough as that, before. I don't know, indeed, that I ever dreamt either a cough or a sneeze. Perhaps it's part of the philosophy of dreams that one never does. There's another—and another—I say!—I'm dreaming rather fast!"

For the purpose of testing his real condition, Mr

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Swiveller, after some reflection, pinched himself in the arm.

"Queerer still!" he thought. "I came to bed rather plump than otherwise, and now there's nothing to lay hold of. I'll take another survey."

The result of this additional inspection was, to convince Mr Swiveller that the objects by which he was surrounded were real, and that he saw them, beyond all question, with his waking eyes.

"It's an Arabian Night; that's what it is," said Richard. "I'm in Damascus or Grand Cairo. The Marchioness is a Genie, and having had a wager with another Genie about who is the handsomest young man alive, and the worthiest to be the husband of the Princess of China, has brought me away, room and all, to compare us together. Perhaps," said Mr Swiveller, turning languidly round on his pillow, and looking on that side of his bed which was next the wall, "the Princess may be still—No, she's gone."

Not feeling quite satisfied with this explanation, as, even taking it to be the correct one, it still involved a little mystery and doubt, Mr Swiveller determined to take the first favourable opportunity of addressing his companion. An occasion soon presented itself. The Marchioness dealt, turned up a knave, and omitted to take the usual advantage; upon which Mr Swiveller called out as loud as he could—"Two for his heels!"

The Marchioness jumped up quickly, and clapped her hands. "Arabian Night, certainly," thought Mr Swiveller; "they always clap their hands instead of ringing the bell. Now for the two thousand black slaves, with jars of jewels on their heads!"

It appeared, however, that she had only clapped her hands for joy; as, directly afterwards she began to laugh, and then to cry; declaring, not in choice Arabic but in familiar English, that she was "so glad, she didn't know what to do."

The Marchioness explains to Dick that he has been ill

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for "three long, slow weeks," during the greater part of which time she has nursed him. She explains that during one of her keyhole perambulations she has heard that his landlady had called at the Brass office and said how ill he was, and had asked whether there was anyone to take care of him. The Brasses having disclaimed any responsibility, she, the Marchioness, ran away from them to go to him, telling the landlady he is her brother.

THE PLOTTERS UNMASKED.

The Marchioness hints that she could say a lot of what she had heard through chinks and keyholes, and at length, on Dick's earnest adjurations, tells him what she has heard, on the strict understanding that he is not to excite himself.

"Well! Before I run away, I used to sleep in the kitchen—where we played cards, you know. Miss Sally used to keep the key of the kitchen door in her pocket, and she always come down at night to take away the candle and rake out the fire. When she had done that, she left me to go to bed in the dark, locked the door on the outside, put the key in her pocket again, and kept me locked up till she come down in the morning—very early I can tell you—and let me out. I was terrible afraid of being kept like this, because if there was a fire, I thought they might forget me and only take care of themselves you know. So, whenever I see an old rusty key anywhere, I picked it up and tried if it would fit the door, and at last I found in the dust cellar a key that *did* fit it."

Here, Mr Swiveller made a violent demonstration with his legs. But the small servant immediately pausing in her talk, he subsided again, and pleading a momentary forgetfulness of their compact, entreated her to proceed.

"They kept me very short," said the small servant. "Oh! you can't think how short they kept me! So I used to come out at night after they'd gone to bed, and feel about in the dark for bits of biscut, or sangwitches that you'd left in the office, or even pieces of orange peel to

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put into cold water and make believe it was wine. Did you ever taste orange peel and water?"

Mr Swiveller replied that he had never tasted that ardent liquor; and once more urged his friend to resume the thread of her narrative.

"If you make believe very much, it's quite nice," said the small servant, "but if you don't, you know, it seems as if it would bear a little more seasoning, certainly. Well, sometimes I used to come out after they'd gone to bed, and sometimes before, you know; and one or two nights before there was all that precious noise in the office—when the young man was took, I mean—I come up-stairs while Mr Brass and Miss Sally was a-sittin' at the office fire, and talking softly together. Mr Brass says to Miss Sally, 'Upon my word,' he says, 'it's a dangerous thing, and it might get us into a world of trouble, and I don't half like it.' She says—you know her way—she says, 'You're the chickenest-hearted, feeblest, faintest man I ever see, and I think,' she says, 'that I ought to have been the brother, and you the sister. Isn't Quilp,' she says, 'our principal support?' 'He certainly is,' says Mr Brass. 'And ain't we,' she says, 'constantly ruining somebody or other in the way of business?' 'We certainly are,' says Mr Brass. 'Then does it signify,' she says, 'about ruining this Kit when Quilp desires it?' 'It certainly does not signify,' says Mr Brass. Then, they whispered and laughed for a long time about there being no danger if it was well done, and then Mr Brass pulls out his pocket-book, and says, 'Well,' he says, 'here it is—Quilp's own five-pound note. We'll agree that way, then,' he says. 'Kit's coming to-morrow morning, I know. While he's up-stairs, you'll get out of the way, and I'll clear off Mr Richard. Having Kit alone, I'll hold him in conversation, and put this property in his hat. I'll manage so, besides,' he says, 'that Mr Richard shall find it there, and be the evidence. And if that don't get Christopher out of Mr Quilp's way, and satisfy Mr Quilp's grudges,' he says, 'the Devil's in it.' Miss Sally laughed,

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and said that was the plan, and as they seemed to be moving away, and I was afraid to stop any longer, I went down-stairs again.—There!”

How Dick sends the Marchioness off posthaste to the notary (Mr Witherden) to tell her story, how that gentleman and Mr Garland at once act upon it, how Sally Brass is confronted, how Sampson appears on the scene fawning and servile, giving all the evidence necessary to free Kit, while Sally will not say an incriminating word, how the latter manages—her honour rooted in dishonour—to send warning to Quilp, how the latter in trying to escape loses his way in the fog and is drowned in the river—all these chastenings of the evil-doers are the work of the insignificant small servant, and the direct result of Dick's patient kindness to her.

That is the lesson Dickens persistently and insistently teaches in all his writings. Wrong must be punished; and he rams the lesson home here with redoubled force when he makes a poor, neglected, starved and beaten drudge the instrument by which the malefactors are brought to justice.

It is good to know that virtue was rewarded. It is good to know that Dick married the Marchioness; and it is as certain that he made her a model husband, as it is that she made him a model wife. To them both!

SAIREY GAMP.
(From *Martin Chuzzlewit*)

EXPLANATION OF CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN THIS SKETCH.

Chuffey—Clerk to Anthony Chuzzlewit & Sons.

Chuzzlewit, Anthony—Head of the above firm.

Chuzzlewit, Jonas—Anthony's son, who marries Mary Pecksniff.

Chuzzlewit, Martin—Brother to Anthony.

Chuzzlewit, Martin, jun.—Grandson of Martin, sen.

Gamp, Sarah ("Sairey")—Midwife and monthly nurse.

Graham, Mary—*Protégée* of Martin, sen.

Harris, Mrs—Sairey Gamp's "Familiar."

Moddle, Augustus—A boarder of Mrs Todgers, captured (temporarily only) by Charity Pecksniff.

Mould, Mr—Undertaker in the ward of Cheap.

Pecksniff, Seth—Architect and arch-hypocrite.

Pecksniff, Charity ("Cherry")—His elder daughter.

Pecksniff, Mercy ("Merry")—His younger daughter.

Pinch, Tom—Mr Pecksniff's "young man."

Pinch, Ruth—His sister; marries John Westlock.

Prig, Betsy—Hospital nurse, colleague of Mrs Gamp.

Sweedlepipe, Paul ("Poll")—Barber and Mrs Gamp's landlord.

Tacker—Mould's foreman.

Tigg, Montague—Scamp and adventurer; murdered by Jonas.

Todgers, Mrs M.—Boarding-house keeper.

Westlock, John—Hater of Pecksniff (formerly his pupil); friend of Tom Pinch; marries Ruth.

SAIREY GAMP.

The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit was published in nineteen monthly parts, beginning in January 1843 and finishing with a double number in July 1844. Strange are the vicissitudes to which fickle Dame Fortune treats her votaries. The previous work, *Barnaby Rudge*, had reached a sale of 50,000 copies per month—a very large figure indeed when the smaller population and the very limited number of people who could read are taken into account. Yet, as *Martin Chuzzlewit* proceeded, its circulation dwindled and continued to dwindle till it had got so low as 23,000; and it is said that it was this diminished and diminishing sale which prompted Dickens to send young Martin to America.

Whether that be so or not, this is certain: that this decreased sale caused Dickens financial embarrassment. Thank God for that! Why? Because the sharp spur of need, caused—I had almost said drove—him to write that glorious pantomime *A Christmas Carol*, whilst yet writing *Martin Chuzzlewit*. I use the word “pantomime” advisedly; for have we not therein mortals and immortals, good and evil spirits; the triumph of right over wrong and a final gorgeous transformation scene? But the most successful pantomime ever staged fades into nothingness beside this perfect presentment of the true spirit of Christmas, this beautiful pen-picture of miser turned philanthropist, of the little happiness that great possessions can bring, and of the great happiness that poverty may enjoy where love is.

We of to-day can have but a faint impression of the sensation this perfect little work created—a sensation amounting to a positive furore. It also had this extraordinary material result: that the attention of the people was focussed upon turkey, sausages and plum pudding as

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visible evidences of the genial spirit of Christmas. So much was this so that Thackeray in one of the most enthusiastic criticisms ever written by one novelist of another said: "I verily believe that had *A Christmas Carol* been published a fortnight earlier" (it was published the first week in December 1843) "there would not have been left a turkey in Norfolk, nor a sausage in Epping."

Perhaps the opening chapter of *Martin Chuzzlewit* had something to do with the falling off I have mentioned. It is headed "Introductory; concerning the Pedigree of the Chuzzlewit family"; it is couched in a vein of heavy, un-Dickenslike humour, and the influence therein of Dickens's favourite eighteenth century writers is very marked. But surely, surely the delightful second chapter, in which the Pecksniff family is introduced, should have convinced his readers that here was Dickens at his best. No! they did not know that they were entertaining angels unawares. Yet these same people knew that about three hundred years before their time there had been a young man named William Shakespeare, whose divine gifts had escaped full recognition during his life. Probably they heaved sighs of regret that it had not been their lot to live when such a peerless star swam into the literary horizon. And here at their very door was the greatest novelist the world had ever seen offering them gargantuan draughts of literary nectar—gargantuan chunks of literary ambrosia—and they turned up their dainty noses and said: not good enough. I hope they lived sufficiently long to repent them of their want of discernment and to realise that *Martin Chuzzlewit* was as fresh, as spontaneous, and as virile, as anything that this inspired novelist had penned.

It might well be called a satire; and, so far as it deals with America, a terrible satire. It is no more characteristic of the people of the United States of the 'forties of last century, than it would be of the United States of to-day. I have no doubt that if one set one's mind on it, one could find Jefferson Bricks, Cyrus Chokes, Hannibal Chollops, Lafayette Kettles, Major Pawkins's, Elijah Pogram's, and Zephaniah

SAIREY GAMP

Scudder's still flourishing; but they would be no more typical of America to-day than they were eighty years ago. It is only because they were monstrosities—abnormalities—that Dickens noticed them. And he noticed them because they were monstrous and abnormal. It would never occur to him that in depicting these exceptions he would be accused of depicting a nation. He was painting on a giant canvas, and his colouring was occasionally crude.

But America resented *Martin Chuzzlewit*; and, from their point of view, quite rightly. They had taken this gifted young man of thirty to their bosoms. They had made much of him. He was, as Washington Irving said, "the guest of the nation." They had opened their hearts to him and his stay there had been one continuous round of hospitality and ovation. And how did he repay them? With this (apparently) dreadful satire; as if the whole of the United States were peopled by Jefferson Bricks, Chollops, Pograms and Scudders.

I say they were right. And I still say they were right, knowing as I do, that in forming their judgment they omitted one important factor—the Dickens point of view. Dickens could no more hold a whole nation up to ridicule because of the foibles of a few unrepresentative men than he could lampoon a personal friend by describing a character as possessing some of that friend's peculiar characteristics. Yet what he did to the United States is exactly what he did to a dear personal friend, and I call in aid his apology for the latter, as an explanation of his satire on the American people.

In *Bleak House* he introduces a character named Harold Skimpole—and that the original of Harold Skimpole was Leigh Hunt cannot be reasonably questioned. Leigh Hunt was a man of an incurable optimism—he was also quite a child in money matters. Both of these traits are shown in Harold Skimpole; but the latter made his ignorance of money matters a virtue, while Leigh Hunt regarded it as a serious misfortune. Never for one moment did Dickens imagine that (to quote his own words) "the admired original

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would ever be charged with the imaginary vices of the fictitious creature."

As with a man, so with a nation. He never imagined that the admired United States would ever be charged—by themselves too—with the vices of such fictitious horrors as Brick, Chollop, Scudder and company.

A Postscript to *Martin Chuzzlewit* gives the text of a speech made by Dickens at a dinner given to him by two hundred representatives of the Press of the United States, and contains as generous an *amende honorable* as ever was uttered :

"So much of my voice has lately been heard in the land, that I might have been contented with troubling you no further from my present standing-point, were it not a duty with which I henceforth charge myself, not only here but on every suitable occasion, whatsoever and wheresoever, to express my high and grateful sense of my second reception in America, and to bear my honest testimony to the national generosity and magnanimity. Also to record that wherever I have been, in the smallest places equally with the largest, I have been received with unsurpassable politeness, delicacy, sweet temper, hospitality, consideration and with unsurpassable respect for the privacy daily forced upon me by the nature of my avocation here and the state of my health. This testimony, so long as I live and so long as my descendants have any legal right in my books, I shall cause to be republished, as an appendix to every copy of those two books of mine in which I have referred to America. And this I will do and cause to be done, not in mere love and thankfulness, but because I regard it as an act of plain justice and honour."

There is, however, one delightful piece of leg-pulling which should have made (as perhaps it did) the whole of the United States smile—an ample apology for pages of the most savage satire.

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Martin and Mark Tapley were on their way to Eden. During the journey a General Choke gets into conversation with them and opines, with regard to Queen Victoria :

"There ain't a en-gine with its biler bust, in God A'mighty's free U-nited States, so fixed, and nipped, and frizzled to a most e-tarnal smash, as that young critter, in her luxurious location in the Tower of London, will be, when she reads the next double-extra Watertoast Gazette."

He then informs Martin that the paper was sent to the Queen, "per mail," addressed to the Tower of London. On Martin observing that the Queen did not live there, General Choke said "with a patient and complacent benevolence that was quite touching" :

"I have always remarked it as a very extraordinary circumstance, which I impute to the natur' of British Institutions and their tendency to suppress that popular inquiry and information which air so widely diffused even in the trackless forests of this vast Continent of the Western Ocean; that the knowledge of Britishers themselves on such points is not to be compared with that possessed by our intelligent and locomotive citizens. When you say, sir, *that your Queen does not reside in the Tower of London, you fall into an error, not uncommon to your countrymen, even when their abilities and moral elements air such as to command respect.*"

Such ignorant vaunting superiority nearly touches the sublime.

Dickens could have had no illusions as to the impatience of Americans at criticism, for shortly after his arrival in New York Martin Chuzzlewit meets a Mr Bevan, who in the course of conversation says :

"No satirist could breathe this air. If another Juvenal or Swift could rise up among us to-morrow, he would be

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hunted down. If you have any knowledge of our literature, and can give me the name of any man, American born and bred, who has anatomised our follies as a people, and not as this or that party; and who has escaped the foulest and most brutal slander, the most inveterate hatred and intolerant pursuit; it will be a strange name in my ears, believe me. In some cases I could name to you, where a native writer has ventured on the most harmless and good-humoured illustrations of our vices or defects, it has been found necessary to announce, that in a second edition the passage has been expunged, or altered, or explained away, or patched into praise."

In *Martin Chuzzlewit* there are fifty-one speaking characters, of whom thirteen are females. Of this large cast, two stand out head and shoulders above the rest—Pecksniff and Sairey Gamp, both of whom take a foremost place in the gallery of great Dickens creations. Pecksniff is so perfectly drawn, is so thoroughly a most precious hypocrite, that his final unmasking by Old Martin Chuzzlewit seems almost a superfluity; and to knock down even such a rascal as Pecksniff with a walking-stick, when he is offering to shake hands, hardly commends itself as a worthy act. Till this (as I think) unnecessary denouement, Pecksniff is precious; Pecksniff is perfect. We know that while he succeeds in deceiving others, he never succeeds in deceiving one—himself. That so consummate an actor as he should have been deceived by the tyrannical Old Martin suddenly becoming his complacently obedient guest, seems almost incredible; that during that period the old man learned anything about Pecksniff that he did not know before seems impossible. In any case we might well ask with Sam Weller's schoolboy over the alphabet: "Was it worth while going through so much to learn so little."

As an antidote to Pecksniff we have dear old Tom Pinch—one of the most lovable persons ever limned; but I prefer the Tom Pinch who so thoroughly believes in Pecksniff—the Tom Pinch who is so simple and trusting that he lends a

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needy scamp like Montague Tigg his last half-sovereign, to the Tom Pinch whose eyes are opened to his employer's villainy, to the Tom Pinch who became librarian in some chambers in the Temple. He was at least a happy somebody in the Pecksniff village; and better a deluded somebody in a village than a wise nobody in London. Still, if the story has a hero, it is he and not Martin, who is but a convenient peg on which to hang the American trip.

But Sairey Gamp! Not all the genius of a Dickens could have evolved such a woman out of his inner consciousness. He *must* have seen something like her somewhere. What a treasure she is! What a perpetual joy is she with her reminiscences of the apochryphal Mrs Harris! It is not difficult to imagine that Dickens at the outset meant to give us a picture of a dirty, dram-drinking, greedy, disreputable old woman—"a fair representation of the hired attendant on the poor in sickness." But his soaring fancy again ran away with him; and from the moment we are introduced to her door-knocker,

. . . which was so constructed as to wake the street with ease, and even spread alarms of fire in Holborn, without making the smallest impression on the premises to which it was addressed,

to the time when she says of the "Ankworks Package":

"And I wish it was in Jonadge's belly, I do," appearing to confound the prophet with the whale in this miraculous aspiration,

she creeps into our affections. We hate her muzzling and guzzling habits, her snuff taking, her filthy rusty garments, her ghoulish delight in a "laying-out"; but in her fictitious conversations with the suppositious Mrs Harris, we realise that even in this disgusting old woman, there is just that touch of romance, which because it is common to us all, we appreciate in her.

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Notwithstanding the favour in which she was held, her utter unfitness for the work of nursing was sufficiently impressed on the public mind to make her and her class anathema; and from the time of the publication of *Martin Chuzzlewit* the nursing conditions of the nation started on the up-grade and continued to improve till they reached their present almost perfect state.

MRS GAMP'S APARTMENT.

Let us take a look at the room which Sairey adorned when not nursing. It is a picture really of a sordid, untidy—probably dirty—room; but Dickens could invest even such things as chairs and drawers and beds with almost an individuality; and in the furniture of Mrs Gamp's room we see—not chairs, nor beds, nor chests of drawers, nor band-boxes; but various aspects of Mrs Gamp. I venture to suggest to my readers that they should read Balzac's description of a room in *Père Goriot's* and compare it with Dickens's description of this room. The one is always sordid furniture sordidly described; the other is sordid furniture almost humanised.

Mrs Gamp's apartment was not a spacious one, but, to a contented mind, a closet is a palace; and the first-floor front at Mr Sweedlepipe's may have been, in the imagination of Mrs Gamp, a stately pile. If it were not exactly that, to restless intellects, it at least comprised as much accommodation as any person, not sanguine to insanity, could have looked for in a room of its dimensions. For only keep the bedstead always in your mind; and you were safe. That was the grand secret. Remembering the bedstead, you might even stoop to look under the little round table for anything you had dropped, without hurting yourself much against the chest of drawers, or qualifying as a patient of Saint Bartholomew, by falling into the fire.

Visitors were much assisted in their cautious efforts to

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preserve an unflagging recollection of this piece of furniture, by its size : which was great. It was not a turn-up bedstead, nor yet a French bedstead, nor yet a four-post bedstead, but what is poetically called a tent : the sacking whereof, was low and bulgy, insomuch that Mrs Gamp's box would not go under it, but stopped half way, in a manner which while it did violence to the reason, likewise endangered the legs, of a stranger. The frame too, which would have supported the canopy and hangings if there had been any, was ornamented with divers pippins carved in timber, which on the slightest provocation, and frequently on none at all, came tumbling down, harassing the peaceful guest with inexplicable terrors.

The bed itself was decorated with a patchwork quilt of great antiquity ; and at the upper end, upon the side nearest to the door, hung a scanty curtain of blue check, which prevented the Zephyrs that were abroad in Kingsgate Street, from visiting Mrs Gamp's head too roughly. Some rusty gowns and other articles of that lady's wardrobe depended from the posts ; and these had so adapted themselves by long usage to her figure, that more than one impatient husband coming in precipitately, at about the time of twilight, had been for an instant stricken dumb by the supposed discovery that Mrs Gamp had hanged herself. One gentleman, coming on the usual hasty errand, had said indeed, that they looked like guardian angels " watching of her in her sleep." But that, as Mrs Gamp said, " was his first " ; and he never repeated the sentiment, though he often repeated his visit.

The chairs in Mrs Gamp's apartment were extremely large and broad-backed, which was more than a sufficient reason for there being but two in number. They were both elbow-chairs, of ancient mahogany ; and were chiefly valuable for the slippery nature of their seats, which had been originally horsehair, but were now covered with a shiny substance of a bluish tint, from which the visitor began to slide away with a dismayed countenance, immediately after sitting down. What Mrs Gamp wanted

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in chairs she made up in bandboxes; of which she had a great collection, devoted to the reception of various miscellaneous valuables, which were not, however, as well protected as the good woman, by a pleasant fiction, seemed to think: for, though every bandbox had a carefully closed lid, not one among them had a bottom: owing to which cause, the property within was merely, as it were, extinguished. The chest of drawers having been originally made to stand upon the top of another chest, had a dwarfish, elfin look, alone; but, in regard to its security it had a great advantage over the bandboxes, for as all the handles had been long ago pulled off, it was very difficult to get at its contents. This indeed was only to be done by one of two devices; either by tilting the whole structure forward until all the drawers fell out together, or by opening them singly with knives, like oysters.

Mrs Gamp stored all her household matters in a little cupboard by the fireplace; beginning below the surface (as in nature) with the coals, and mounting gradually upwards to the spirits, which, from motives of delicacy, she kept in a tea-pot. The chimney-piece was ornamented with a small almanack, marked here and there in Mrs Gamp's own hand, with a memorandum of the date at which some lady was expected to fall due. It was also embellished with three profiles: one, in colours, of Mrs Gamp herself in early life; one, in bronze, of a lady in feathers, supposed to be Mrs Harris, as she appeared when dressed for a ball; and one, in black, of Mr Gamp, deceased. The last was a full length, in order that the likeness might be rendered more obvious and forcible, by the introduction of the wooden leg.

A pair of bellows, a pair of pattens, a toasting-fork, a kettle, a pap-boat, a spoon for the administration of medicine to the refractory, and lastly, Mrs Gamp's umbrella, which as something of great price and rarity was displayed with particular ostentation, completed the decorations of the chimney-piece and adjacent wall.

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PECKSNIFF TRIES THE KNOCKER.

Mr Pecksniff was at the house of Anthony Chuzzlewit, when the latter died; and Jonas had sent him to Mrs Gamp,

“... a female functionary, a nurse and watcher; and performer of nameless offices about the persons of the dead.”

Pecksniff was of course quite ignorant of the peculiar qualities of Mrs Gamp's knocker, to which, at first, in the innocence of his heart, he applied himself.

But at the first double knock, every window in the street became alive with female heads; and before he could repeat the performance, whole troops of married ladies (some about to trouble Mrs Gamp themselves, very shortly) came flocking round the steps, all crying out with one accord, and with uncommon interest, “Knock at the winder, sir, knock at the winder. Lord bless you, don't lose no more time than you can help; knock at the winder!”

Acting upon this suggestion, and borrowing the driver's whip for the purpose, Mr Pecksniff soon made a commotion among the first-floor flower-pots, and roused Mrs Gamp, whose voice—to the great satisfaction of the matrons—was heard to say, “I'm coming.”

“He's as pale as a muffin,” said one lady, in allusion to Mr Pecksniff.

“So he ought to be, if he's the feelings of a man,” observed another.

A third lady (with her arms folded) said she wished he had chosen any other time for fetching Mrs Gamp, but it always happened so with *her*.

It gave Mr Pecksniff much uneasiness to find, from these remarks, that he was supposed to have come to Mrs Gamp upon an errand touching—not the close of life, but the other end. Mrs Gamp herself was under the

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same impression, for, throwing open the window, she cried behind the curtains, as she hastily attired herself :

"Is it Mrs Perkins?"

"No!" returned Mr Pecksniff, sharply. "Nothing of the sort."

"What, Mr Whilks!" cried Mrs Gamp. "Don't say it's you, Mr Whilks, and that poor creetur Mrs Whilks with not even a pincushion ready. Don't say it's you, Mr Whilks!"

"It isn't Mr Whilks," said Pecksniff. "I don't know the man. Nothing of the kind. A gentleman is dead; and some person being wanted in the house, you have been recommended by Mr Mould the undertaker."

But the matrons took it very ill, that Mr Pecksniff's mission was of so unimportant a kind; and the lady with her arms folded rated him in good round terms, signifying that she would be glad to know what he meant by terrifying delicate females "with his corpses"; and giving it as her opinion that he was quite ugly enough to know better. The other ladies were not at all behind-hand in expressing similar sentiments; and the children, of whom some scores had now collected, hooted and defied Mr Pecksniff quite savagely. So, when Mrs Gamp appeared, the unoffending gentleman was glad to hustle her with very little ceremony into the cabriolet, and drive off, overwhelmed with popular execration.

ENTER THE "LOVELY SAIREY."

A first sight of Mrs Gamp without a description of her umbrella—her inseparable companion—could not be tolerated. It was

"... a species of gig umbrella; in colour like a faded leaf, except where a circular patch of a lively blue had been dexterously let in at the top."

Could anything be more perfect as a pen-picture than this description of the lady herself?

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She was a fat old woman, this Mrs Gamp, with a husky voice and a moist eye, which she had a remarkable power of turning up, and only showing the white of it. Having very little neck, it cost her some trouble to look over herself, if one may say so, at those to whom she talked. She wore a very rusty black gown, rather the worse for snuff, and a shawl and bonnet to correspond. In these dilapidated articles of dress she had, on principle, arrayed herself, time out of mind, on such occasions as the present; for this at once expressed a decent amount of veneration for the deceased, and invited the next of kin to present her with a fresher suit of weeds: an appeal so frequently successful, that the very fetch and ghost of Mrs Gamp, bonnet and all, might be seen hanging up, any hour in the day, in at least a dozen of the second-hand clothes shops about Holborn. The face of Mrs Gamp—the nose in particular—was somewhat red and swollen, and it was difficult to enjoy her society without becoming conscious of a smell of spirits. Like most persons who have attained to great eminence in their profession, she took to hers very kindly; insomuch, that setting aside her natural predilections as a woman, she went to a lying-in or a laying-out with equal zest and relish.

“Ah!” repeated Mrs Gamp; for it was always a safe sentiment in cases of mourning. “Ah, dear! When Gamp was summoned to his long home, and I see him a-lying in Guy’s Hospital with a penny-piece on each eye, and his wooden leg under his left arm, I thought I should have fainted away. But I bore up.”

If certain whispers current in the Kingsgate Street circles had any truth in them, she had indeed borne up surprisingly; and had exerted such uncommon fortitude, as to dispose of Mr Gamp’s remains for the benefit of science. But it should be added, in fairness, that this had happened twenty years before; and that Mr and Mrs Gamp had long been separated, on the ground of incompatibility of temper in their drink.

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THE GAMP GOLDEN GUIDE.

"Use is second nature," opined Mr Pecksniff.

"You may well say second nater, sir," returned that lady. "One's first ways is to find sich things a trial to the feelings, and so is one's lasting custom. If it wasn't for the nerve a little sip of liquor gives me (I never was able to do more than taste it), I never could go through with what I sometimes has to do. 'Mrs Harris,' I says, at the very last case as ever I acted in, which it was but a young person, 'Mrs Harris,' I says, 'leave the bottle on the chimley-piece, and don't ask me to take none, but let me put my lips to it when I am so disposed, and then I will do what I'm engaged to do, according to the best of my ability.' 'Mrs Gamp,' she says, in answer, 'if ever there was a sober creetur to be got at eighteenpence a day for working people, and three-and-six for gentle-folks—night watching.' " said Mrs Gamp, with emphasis, "'being a extra charge—you are that inwallable person.' 'Mrs Harris,' I says to her, 'don't name the charge, for if I could afford to lay all my feller creeturs out for nothink, I would gladly do it, sich is the love I bears 'em. But what I always says to them as has the management of matters, Mrs Harris' "—here she kept her eye on Mr Pecksniff—" 'be they gents or be they ladies, is, don't ask me whether I won't take none, or whether I will, but leave the bottle on the chimley-piece, and let me put my lips to it when I am so disposed.' "

ROOSHANS AND PROOSHANS.

Poor Chuffey, Anthony Chuzzlewit's ancient clerk, could not bring himself to leave the body of his old master; and this attitude rouses Mrs Gamp's ire.

"It is not much as I have to say, when people is a-mourning for the dead and gone," said Mrs Gamp; "but what I have to say is *to* the pint and purpose, and no

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offence intended, must be so considered. I have been at a many places in my time, gentlemen, and I hope I knows what my duties is, and how the same should be performed; in course, if I did not, it would be very strange, and very wrong in sich a gentleman as Mr Mould, which has undertook the highest families in this land, and given every satisfaction, so to recommend me as he does. I have seen a deal of trouble my own self," said Mrs Gamp, laying greater and greater stress upon her words, "and I can feel for them as has their feelings tried, but I am not a Rooshan or a Prooshan, and consequently cannot suffer spies to be set over me."

Before it was possible that an answer could be returned, Mrs Gamp, growing redder in the face, went on to say,—

"It is not a easy matter, gentlemen, to live when you are left a widder woman; particular when your feelings works upon you to that extent that you often find yourself a-going out on terms which is a certain loss, and never can repay. But, in whatever way you earns your bread, you may have rules and regulations of your own, which cannot be broke through. Some people," said Mrs Gamp, again entrenching herself behind her strong point, as if it were not assailable by human ingenuity, "may be Rooshans, and others may be Prooshans; they are born so, and will please themselves. Them which is of other natures think different."

LIGHT REFRESHMENT.

In her drinking, Mrs Gamp was very punctual and particular, requiring a pint of mild porter at lunch, a pint at dinner, half a pint as a species of stay or holdfast between dinner and tea, and a pint of the celebrated staggering ale, or real Old Brighton Tipper, at supper; besides the bottle on the chimney-piece, and such casual invitations to refresh herself with wine as the good breeding of her employers might prompt them to offer.

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NURSE AND UNDERTAKER.

The undertaker who had charge of the obsequies of Anthony Chuzzlewit was Mr Mould (felicitious name!), between whom and Mrs Gamp a perfect understanding existed, as the following interview will show :

At length the day of the funeral, pious and truthful ceremony that it was, arrived. Mr Mould, with a glass of generous port between his eye and the light, leaned against the desk in the little glass office with his gold watch in his unoccupied hand, and conversed with Mrs Gamp; two mutes were at the house-door, looking as mournful as could be reasonably expected of men with such a thriving job in hand; the whole of Mr Mould's establishment were on duty within the house or without; feathers waved, horses snorted, silks and velvets fluttered; in a word, as Mr Mould emphatically said, "everything that money could do was done."

"And what can do more, Mrs Gamp?" exclaimed the undertaker, as he emptied his glass, and smacked his lips.

"Nothing in the world, sir."

"Nothing in the world," repeated Mr Mould. "You are right, Mrs Gamp. Why do people spend more money"—here he filled his glass again—"upon a death, Mrs Gamp, than upon a birth. Come, that's in your way; you ought to know. How do you account for that now?"

"Perhaps it is because an undertaker's charges comes dearer than a nurse's charges, sir," said Mrs Gamp, tittering, and smoothing down her new black dress with her hands.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr Mould. "You have been breakfasting at somebody's expense this morning, Mrs Gamp." But seeing, by the aid of a little shaving-glass which hung opposite, that he looked merry, he composed his features and became sorrowful.

"Many's the time that I've not breakfasted at my own expense along of your kind recommending, sir; and

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many's the time I hope to do the same in time to come," said Mrs Gamp, with an apologetic curtsy.

"So be it," replied Mr Mould, "please Providence. No, Mrs Gamp; I'll tell you why it is. It's because the laying out of money with a well-conducted establishment, where the thing is performed upon the very best scale, binds the broken heart, and sheds balm upon the wounded spirit. Hearts want binding, and spirits want balming when people die: not when people are born."

MR MOULD AT HOME.

Mrs Gamp had remained on at Jonas Chuzzlewit's to look after Mr Chuffey. In view of her understanding with Mr Mould, it is not to be wondered at that, when she required some little favour in connection with her charge, she should seek the influence of the undertaker.

A short glance at Mr Mould's business methods will serve to show the deep insight which Dickens had into all sorts and conditions of minds.

He and Mrs Mould and his two daughters are seated in the sitting-room of their establishment, "deep in the City and within the ward of Cheap." From the shop arose "a pleasant sound of coffin making, with a low melodious hammer rat, tat, tat"; which Mrs Mould, seized with poetic fire, likened to the woodpecker tapping "the hollow *elm* tree."

Now at this time there was a song which was very popular:

"I knew by the smoke that so gracefully curled
Above the green trees that a cottage was near;
And I said, 'If there's peace to be found in the world,
A heart without envy might hope for it here.'
Every leaf was at rest, and I heard not a sound,
But the woodpecker tapping the hollow beech tree."

So when Mrs Mould, adapting the words to their own

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particular business, said: "The woodpecker tapping the hollow *elm* tree," Mr Mould was extremely tickled. Whilst in the pleasant mood engendered by this paraphrase, enter Mr Tacker—the foreman—asking his employer if he was "inclined to take a walking one of two, with plain wood and a tin plate"—meaning, I suppose, a walking funeral with two bearers.

"Certainly not," replied Mr Mould, "much too common. Nothing to say to it."

"I told 'em it was precious low," observed Mr Tacker.

"Tell 'em to go somewhere else. We don't do that style of business here," said Mr Mould. "Like their impudence to propose it. Who is it?"

"Why," returned Tacker, pausing, "that's where it is, you see. It's the beadle's son-in-law."

"The beadle's son-in-law, eh?" said Mould. "Well! I'll do it if the beadle follows in his cocked hat; not else. We carry it off that way, by looking official, but it'll be low enough then. His cocked hat, mind!"

A PILJIAN'S PROJISS.

Being informed that Mrs Gamp wished to see him, Mr Mould directed that she should be sent up; and her entrance into the room is thus described, the first short paragraph giving a truer and wittier description of her personal habits than many pages could do:

The lady in question was by this time in the doorway, curtsying to Mrs Mould. At the same moment a peculiar fragrance was borne upon the breeze, as if a passing fairy had hiccoughed, and had previously been to a wine-vaults.

Mrs Gamp made no response to Mr Mould, but curtsied to Mrs Mould again, and held up her hands and eyes, as in a devout thanksgiving that she looked so well. She was neatly, but not gaudily attired, in the weeds she

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had worn when Mr Pecksniff had the pleasure of making her acquaintance; and was perhaps the turning of a scale more snuffy.

"There are some happy creeturs," Mrs Gamp observed, "as time runs back'ards with, and you are one, Mrs Mould; not that he need do nothing except use you in his most owldacious way for years to come, I'm sure; for young you are and will be. I says to Mrs Harris," Mrs Gamp continued, "only t'other day; the last Monday evening fortnight as ever dawned upon this Piljian's Projiss of a mortal wale; I says to Mrs Harris when she says to me, 'Years and our trials, Mrs Gamp, sets marks upon us all.'—'Say not the words, Mrs Harris, if you and me is to be continual friends, for sech is not the case. Mrs Mould,' I says, making so free, I will confess, as use the name'—(she curtseyed here)—'is one of them that goes agen the obseruation straight; and never, Mrs Harris, whilst I've a drop of breath to draw, will I set by, and not stand up, don't think it.'—'I ast your pardon, ma'am,' says Mrs Harris, 'and I humbly grant your grace; for if ever a woman lived as would see her feller creeturs into fits to serve her friends, well do I know that woman's name is Sairey Gamp.'"

THE MYSTERY OF MRS HARRIS.

At this point she was fain to stop for breath; and advantage may be taken of the circumstance, to state that a fearful mystery surrounded this lady of the name of Harris, whom no one in the circle of Mrs Gamp's acquaintance had ever seen; neither did any human being know her place of residence, though Mrs Gamp appeared on her own showing to be in constant communication with her. There were conflicting rumours on the subject; but the prevalent opinion was that she was a phantom of Mrs Gamp's brain—as Messrs Doe and Roe are fictions of the law—created for the express purpose of holding visionary dialogues with her on all manner of subjects,

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and invariably winding up with a compliment to the excellence of her nature.

Only once did Mrs Gamp give anything like an address of this familiar spirit; and that was vague enough in all conscience :

“Through the square, and up the steps, a-turnin’ round by the tobacker shop.”

Only one person ever had the temerity to doubt the existence of Mrs Harris; that was Betsy Prig, as will be related hereafter; but that doubt expressed in the words: “I don’t believe there ain’t no sich person,” snapped the thread of their friendship—doubtless to the great benefit of their joint patients—present and to come.

MARRYINGS AND BERRYINGS.

Mrs Gamp had come to ask a favour of Mr Mould, so she proceeded to distribute compliments all round :

“And likeways what a pleasure,” said Mrs Gamp, turning with a tearful smile towards the daughters, “to see them two young ladies as I know’d afore a tooth in their pretty heads was cut, and have many a day seen—ah, the sweet creeturs!—playing at berryins down in the shop, and follerin’ the order-book to its long home in the iron safe! But that’s all past and over, Mr Mould” as she thus got in a carefully regulated routine to that gentleman, she shook her head waggishly. “That’s all past and over now, sir, ain’t it? Young ladies with such faces thinks of something else besides berryins, don’t they, sir?”

“I am sure I don’t know, Mrs Gamp,” said Mould, with a chuckle.—“Not bad in Mrs Gamp, my dear?”

“Oh yes, you do know, sir!” said Mrs Gamp, “and so does Mrs Mould, your ansome pardner too, sir; and so do I, although the blessing of a daughter was deniged

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me; which, if we had had one, Gamp would certainly have drunk its little shoes right off its feet, as with our precious boy he did, and arterwards send the child a errand to sell his wooden leg for any money it would fetch as matches in the rough, and bring it home in liquor : which was truly done beyond his years, for ev'ry individgle penny that child lost at toss or buy for kidney ones; and come home arterwards quite bold, to break the news, and offering to drown himself if that would be a satisfaction to his parents.—Oh yes, you do know, sir," said Mrs Gamp, wiping her eye with her shawl, and resuming the thread of her discourse. "There's something besides births and berryins in the newspapers, ain't there, Mr Mould? There's marryings, ain't there, sir? Bless their precious hearts, and well they knows it! Well you know'd it too, and well did Mrs Mould, when you was at their time of life! But my opinion is, you're all of one age now. For as to you and Mrs Mould, sir, ever having grand-children—"

"Oh! Fie, fie! Nonsense, Mrs Gamp," replied the undertaker. "Devilish smart, though. Ca-pi-tal!" This was in a whisper. "My dear," aloud again, "Mrs Gamp can drink a glass of rum, I dare say. Sit down, Mrs Gamp, sit down."

Mrs Gamp took the chair that was nearest the door, and casting up her eyes towards the ceiling, feigned to be wholly insensible to the fact of a glass of rum being in preparation, until it was placed in her hand by one of the young ladies, when she exhibited the greatest surprise.

"A thing," she said, "as hardly ever, Mrs Mould, occurs with me unless it is when I am indisposed, and find my half a pint of porter settling heavy on the chest. Mrs Harris often and often says to me, 'Sairey Gamp,' she says, 'you raly do amaze me!' 'Mrs Harris,' I says to her, 'why so? Give it a name, I beg.' 'Telling the truth then, ma'am,' says Mrs Harris, 'and shaming him as shall be nameless betwixt you and me, never did I think till I know'd you, as any woman could sick-nurse

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and monthly likeways, on the little that you takes to drink.' 'Mrs Harris,' I says to her, 'none on us knows what we can do till we tries; and wunst, when me and Gamp kept 'ouse, I thought so too. But now,' I says, 'my half a pint of porter fully satisfies; perwisin', Mrs Harris, that it is brought reg'lar, and draw'd mild. Whether I sick or monthlies, ma'am, I hope I does my duty, but I am but a poor woman, and I earns my living hard; therefore I *do* require it, which I makes confession, to be brought reg'lar and draw'd mild.' "

NURSES AND PATIENT.

The favour that Mrs Gamp had to ask of Mr Mould was that she should be allowed to leave Mr Chuffey at night, so that she might night nurse with Betsy Prig, turn and turn about, at the "Bull" in Holborn. Assent being given, and Mrs Gamp having cleverly hinted that her good word was at Mr Mould's disposal "if the gentleman should die," made her way to the "Bull" that evening. Here is an illustration of how much these harpies thought of themselves and how little of their patients :

"Anythin' to tell afore you goes, my dear?" asked Mrs Gamp, setting her bundle down inside the door, and looking affectionately at her partner.

"The pickled salmon," Mrs Prig replied, "is quite delicious. I can partick'ler recommend it. Don't have nothink to say to the cold meat, for it tastes of the stable. The drinks is all good."

Mrs Gamp expressed herself much gratified.

"The physic and them things is on the drawers and mankleshef," said Mrs Prig, cursorily. "He took his last slime draught at seven. The easy-chair ain't soft enough. You'll want his piller."

Her examination of her patient shows a repulsive side of Sairey's nature :

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Mrs Gamp solaced herself with a pinch of snuff, and stood looking at him with her head inclined a little sideways, as a connoisseur might gaze upon a doubtful work of art. By degrees, a horrible remembrance of one branch of her calling took possession of the woman; and, stooping down, she pinned his wandering arms against his sides, to see how he would look if laid out as a dead man. Hideous as it may appear, her fingers itched to compose his limbs in that last marble attitude.

"Ah!" said Mrs Gamp, walking away from the bed, "he'd make a lovely corpse."

A LIGHT REPAST.

Having made her preparations for the night, the lady felt it was high time for supper; she accordingly rang the bell.

"I think, young woman," said Mrs Gamp to the assistant chambermaid, in a tone expressive of weakness, "that I could pick a little bit of pickled salmon, with a nice little sprig of fennel, and a sprinkling of white pepper. I takes new bread, my dear, with jest a little pat of fresh butter, and a mossel of cheese. In case there should be such a thing as a cowcumber in the 'ouse, will you be so kind as bring it, for I'm rather partial to 'em, and they does a world of good in a sick room. If they draws the Brighton Tipper here, I takes *that* ale at night, my love, it being considered wakeful by the doctors. And whatever you do, young woman, don't bring more than a shilling's-worth of gin and water warm when I rings the bell a second time; for that is always my allowance, and I never takes a drop beyond!"

Having preferred these moderate requests, Mrs Gamp observed that she would stand at the door until the order was executed, to the end that the patient might not be disturbed by her opening it a second time; and therefore she would thank the young woman to "look sharp."

A tray was brought with everything upon it, even to the cucumber; and Mrs Gamp accordingly sat down to

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eat and drink in high good-humour. The extent to which she availed herself of the vinegar, and supped up that refreshing fluid with the blade of her knife, can scarcely be expressed in narrative.

"Ah!" sighed Mrs Gamp, as she meditated over the warm shilling's-worth, "what a blessed thing it is—living in a wale—to be contented! What a blessed thing it is to make sick people happy in their beds, and never mind one's self as long as one can do a service! I don't believe a finer cowcumber was ever grow'd. I'm sure I never see one!"

She moralised in the same vein until her glass was empty, and then administered the patient's medicine, by the simple process of clutching his windpipe to make him gasp, and immediately pouring it down his throat.

"I a'most forgot the piller, I declare!" said Mrs Gamp, drawing it away. "There! Now he's comfortable as he can be, I'm sure! I must try to make myself as much so as I can."

THEM CONFUGION STEAMERS.

Judging from her conversations, Mrs Gamp was certainly an enthusiast in her work—however badly she may have performed her duties. One day we find her interested in the departure of the Antwerp packet—which she describes as the "Aukworks Package." Being informed which was that particular vessel, she feelingly said:

"And I wish it was in Jonadge's belly," . . . thus confounding the prophet with the whale in that miraculous aspiration. Then, apostrophising the "Package" and shaking her umbrella at it, she said:

"Oh, drat you! You're a nice spluttering noisy monster for a delicate young creetur to go and be a passinger by, ain't you. *You* never do no harm in that way, do you? With your hammering, and roaring, and hissing, and lamp-iling, you brute! Them Confugion steamers," said Mrs Gamp, shaking her umbrella again, "has done more

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to throw us out of our reg'lar work and bring ewents on at times when nobody counted on 'em (especially them screeching railroad ones), than all the other frights that ever was took. I have heerd of one young man, a guard upon a railway only three years opened—well does Mrs Harris know him, which indeed he is her own relation by her sister's marriage with a master sawyer, as is god-father at this present time to six-and-twenty blessed little strangers, equally unexpected, and all on 'em named after the Ingeins as was the cause. Ugh!" said Mrs Gamp, resuming her apostrophe, "one might easy know you was a man's invention, from your disregardlessness of the weakness of our naturs—so one might, you brute!"

SAIREY MAKES TEA FOR A PARTY.

She is still at Jonas Chuzzlewit's (who has married Mercy—otherwise "Merry"—Pecksniff), looking after Mr Chuffey; and one day there is a great influx of visitors. There are Mrs Todgers—of boarding-house fame—Miss Charity Pecksniff and her reluctant fiancé, Mr Augustus Moddle; Tom Pinch and his sister Ruth. In this episode we see Mrs Gamp at her best, and the speech in which she welcomes them all, singling out each one for individual attention, is a triumph of perspicuity.

"Why, goodness me!" she said. "To think as I should see beneath this blessed 'ouse, which well I know it, Miss Pecksniff, my sweet young lady, to be a 'ouse as there is not a many like, worse luck, and wishin' it were not so, which then this tearful walley would be changed into a flowerin' guardian, Mr Chuffey; to think as I should see beneath this indiwiddle roof, identically comin', Mr Pinch (I take the liberty, though almost unbeknown), and do assure you of it, sir, the smiliness and sweetest face as ever, Mrs Chuzzlewit, I see, exceptin' yourn, my dear good lady, and *your* good lady's too, sir, Mr Moddle, if I may make so bold as to speak so plain of what is plain enough to them as needn't look through millstones, Mrs

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Todgers, to find out wot is wrote upon the wall behind. Which no offence is meant, ladies and gentlemen; none bein' took, I hope. To think as I should see that smiliness and sweetest face which me and another friend of mine, took notice of among the packages down London Bridge, in this promiscuous place, is a surprize in-deed!"

A MAD BULL IN WELLINGTON BOOTS.

It was Tom and Ruth Pinch she had met when she uttered her diatribe against the "Package." She continues:

"Now, ain't we rich in beauty this here joyful arternoon, I'm sure. I knows a lady, which her name, I'll not deceive you, Mrs Chuzzlewit, is Harris, her husband's brother bein' six foot three, and marked with a mad bull in Wellington boots upon his left arm, on account of his precious mother havin' been worritted by one into a shoe-maker's shop, when in a sitiuation which blessed is the man as has his quiver full of sech, as many times I've said to Gamp when words has roge betwixt us on account of the expense—and often have I said to Mrs Harris, 'Oh, Mrs Harris, ma'am! your countenance is quite a angel's!' Which, but for Pimples, it would be. 'No, Sairey Gamp,' says she, 'you best of hard-working and industrious creeturs as ever was underpaid at any price, which underpaid you are, quite diff'rent. Harris had it done afore marriage at ten and six,' she says, 'and wore it faithful next his heart 'till the colour run, when the money was declined to be give back, and no arrangement could be come to. But he never said it was a angel's, Sairey, wotever he might have thought.' If Mrs Harris's husband was here now," said Mrs Gamp, looking round, and chuckling as she dropped a general curtsy, "he'd speak out plain, he would, and his dear wife would be the last to blame him! For if ever a woman lived as know'd not wot it was to form a wish to pizon them as had good looks, and had no reagon give her by the best of husbands, Mrs Harris is that evnly dispogician!"

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A KEEPSAKE FOR MRS HARRIS.

In high good humour she keeps the ball of conversation a-rolling; and while appearing to be intensely interested in the welfare of the company, never fails to look after her own needs.

"And quite a family it is to make tea for, and wot a happiness to do it! My good young 'ooman"—to the servant-girl—"p'raps somebody would like to try a new-laid egg or two, not biled too hard. Likeways, a few rounds o' buttered toast, first cuttin' off the crust, in consequence of tender teeth, and not too many of 'em; which Gamp himself, Mrs Chuzzlewit, at one blow, being in liquor, struck out four, two single and two double, as was took by Mrs Harris for a keepsake, and is carried in her pocket at this present hour, along with two cramp-bones, a bit o' ginger, and a grater like a blessed infant's shoe, in tin, with a little heel to put the nutmeg in, as many times I've seen and said, and used for caudle when required, within the month."

As the privileges of the side-table—besides including the small prerogatives of sitting next the toast, and taking two cups of tea to other people's one, and always taking them at a crisis—that is to say, before putting fresh water into the tea-pot, and after it had been standing for some time—also comprehended a full view of the company, and an opportunity of addressing them as from a rostrum, Mrs Gamp discharged the functions entrusted to her with extreme affability.

SAIREY ENTERTAINS BETSY PRIG.

One never-to-be-forgotten afternoon these two ladies had tea together; an afternoon celebrated for all time by reason of the fact that it was on this occasion that Betsy Prig uttered the unforgivable heresy with regard to Mrs Harris: "I don't believe there's no sich a person."

Betsy Prig's first remark on entering Mrs Gamp's

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apartment was characteristic. Sweeping an eagle eye over the tea-table, she said :

"I know'd she wouldn't have a cowcumber !"

Mrs Gamp changed colour, and sat down upon the bedstead.

"Lord bless you, Betsy Prig, your words is true. I quite forgot it !"

Mrs Prig, looking steadfastly at her friend, put her hand in her pocket, and with an air of surly triumph drew forth either the oldest of lettuces or youngest of cabbages, but at any rate a green vegetable of an expansive nature, and of such magnificent proportions that she was obliged to shut it up like an umbrella before she could pull it out. She also produced a handful of mustard and cress, a trifle of the herb called dandelion, three bunches of radishes, an onion rather larger than an average turnip, three substantial slices of beetroot, and a short prong or antler of celery ; the whole of this garden-stuff having been publicly exhibited, but a short time before, as a twopenny salad, and purchased by Mrs Prig on condition that the vendor could get it all into her pocket. Which had been happily accomplished in High Holborn, to the breathless interest of a hackney-coach stand. And she laid so little stress on this surprising forethought that she did not even smile, but returning her pocket into its accustomed sphere, merely recommended that these productions of nature should be sliced up for immediate consumption in plenty of vinegar.

"And don't go a'dropping none of your snuff in it," said Mrs Prig. "In gruel, barley water, apple tea, mutton broth, and that, it don't signify. It stimulates a patient. But I don't relish it myself."

A "HARRIS" REMINISCENCE.

This tea-party (for two) is really held in order that Sairey may arrange with Betsy for another case of nursing—

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turn and turn about. On mentioning the matter (after many applications to the tea-pot containing the gin), Mrs Prig asks—with just a suspicion of sarcasm—"Was it Mrs Harris?" to which Mrs Gamp gives a decided negative; at which reply Mrs Prig says: "I'm glad of that, at any rate," as one relieved of some heavy burden. Whereupon Sairey says:

"Why should you be glad of that, Betsy?" Mrs Gamp retorted, warmly. "She is unbeknown to you except by hearsay, why should you be glad? If you have anythink to say contrairy to the character of Mrs Harris, which well I knows, behind her back, afore her face, or anywheres, is not to be impeaged, out with it, Betsy. I have know'd that sweetest and best of women," said Mrs Gamp, shaking her head, and shedding tears, "ever since afore her First, which Mr Harris who was dreadful timid went and stopped his ears in a empty dog-kennel, and never took his hands away or come out once till he was showed the baby, wen bein' took with fits, the doctor collared him and laid him on his back upon the airy stones, and she was told to ease her mind, his 'owls was organs. And I have know'd her, Betsy Prig, when he has hurt her feelin' 'art by sayin' of his Ninth that it was one too many, if not two, while that dear innocent was cooin' in his face, which thrive it did though bandy, but I have never know'd as you had occagion to be glad, Betsy, on accounts of Mrs Harris not requiring you. Require she never will, depend upon it, for her constant words in sickness is, and will be, 'Send for Sairey!'"

With the words, "Send for Sairey," I will ring down the curtain on this disreputable, dirty, drinking but delightful old woman.

VI

MRS SPARSIT'S STAIRCASE.

(From *Hard Times*)

EXPLANATION OF CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN THIS SKETCH.

Bitzer—Porter at Bounderby's Bank.

Blackpool, Stephen—Worker at Bounderby's Mill.

Bounderby, Josiah—Banker, cotton miller, "the bully of humility."

Bounderby, Louisa—His wife, and daughter of Gradgrind.

Gradgrind, Thomas—A "hard fact fellow."

Gradgrind, Mrs—His wife.

Gradgrind, Thomas—Son and "whelp."

Harthouse, James—Man about Town and pursuer of Louisa.

Jupe, Cecilia—"Sissy."

Rachel—Stephen Blackpool's good angel.

Sleary—Circus proprietor.

Sparsit, Mrs—Bounderby's housekeeper. "A highly connected lady."

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Hard Times is one of Dicken's shorter novels, and was published in *Household Words* in monthly parts, April to August, 1854; appearing in book form in the latter month. It is noteworthy too for the fact that with the exception of *A Tale of Two Cities* it contains fewer characters than any other of his novels.

In this book Dickens's humanity is strongly to the fore; so strongly indeed that, in the creation of one character at least, it becomes inhuman. Not even Coketown—in which the scene is laid—with all its chimneys and other depressing effects—could produce such a blustering bounder, bully, hypocrite and snob as Josiah Bounderby.

By the way, and purely as a matter of philological interest, it has occurred to me that, if I am right in assuming that this word "bounder" was not used till nearly thirty years after *Hard Times* was written, in the sense in which it is now accepted, it was curious that Dickens should have incorporated it in Bounderby's name, and that Bounderby should be all that is comprised in the present use of the word.

Dickens's description of him is in his best style.

He was a rich man : banker, merchant, manufacturer, and what not. A big, loud man, with a stare, and a metallic laugh. A man made out of a coarse material, which seemed to have been stretched to make so much of him. A man with a great puffed head and forehead, swelled veins in his temples, and such a strained skin to his face that it seemed to hold his eyes open, and lift his eyebrows up. A man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon, and ready to start. A man who

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could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man. A man who was always proclaiming, through that brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice of his, his old ignorance and his old poverty. A man who was the Bully of humility.

It was also a fixed opinion of his that the poor people had a continued hankering after venison and turtle soup and that only by gold spoons ought they to be fed.

Byron in his *Apostrophe to the Ocean*, says: "Even from out thy slime the monsters of the deep are made"; and from the lees of Dickens's deadly hate of all those who would stand between him and his heart's desire—the amelioration of the lot of the poor, that they should have a fuller life, with something of beauty in it—arose this monster Bounderby. There is not one redeeming feature in him. In his fictitious account of his early struggles he is a liar and a libeller of his devoted, adoring mother; in his relations with his young wife, he is a bully; in his vengeful pursuit of his wife's brother—"the whelp"—for defalcations, he is utterly malignant; and in his obsequiousness to his housekeeper, Mrs Sparsit, because she is "a real gentlewoman," he is a toady. To give such a man so comparatively comfortable a death as an apoplectic seizure seems almost an act of humanity. Something lingering with boiling oil in it would have nearly given him his deserts—not quite.

There are certain peculiarities in the construction of *Hard Times*—certain absences of essentially Dickensian traits—that give pause for thought and question. Why this atmosphere of gloom already sufficiently evident in *Bleak House*, which had been completed late in the previous year (1853), having taken two years in writing? Why this conciseness and precision and restraint so utterly at variance with his almost boisterous and genially flowing style? The only answer is that he had intended, after completing *Bleak House*, to rest for a whole year; but the idea of *Hard Times* "laid hold of me by the throat in a very violent manner." It was finished in five months, and Dickens admitted that it had "used him up."

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My own idea is that he drew too freely on the emotional side of his nature; that he *felt* all he wrote; that he *saw* the sufferings of the poor—saw them far too acutely; and that he realised how little even his tremendous hold on the minds of the people could do to bring about any really effective reform. He made no secret of his belief in that hold on the public; he openly claimed that the relations existing between himself and the public were these of exceptional sympathy and affection. He took an honourable pride in the feeling which he inspired. Yet I cannot help thinking that in writing *Hard Times*, in putting into it all the scathing indignation against harshness and injustice he felt so strongly—in pleading as only he could plead for the weak and the down-trodden—he realised—perhaps with something akin to despair—what a tremendous force he was up against; and that may be, all his thunders would be in vain.

There is also this to be taken into consideration: In his denunciations of Yorkshire schools his readers being of the educated classes would be entirely with him; and the same thing would apply to his exposure of utterly inefficient nurses in the shape of Sairey Gamp and Betsy Prig. But in *Hard Times* the people *for* whom he was appealing—the poor and uneducated—would not be among his readers—directly at any rate; whilst the majority of those *to* whom he was appealing—the employers, the monied and leisured classes—would be interested in “leaving well alone.”

How could employers sympathise with the aims of a writer who wrote of them:

They were ruined, when they were required to send labouring children to school; they were ruined when inspectors were appointed to look into their works; they were ruined, when such inspectors considered it doubtful whether they were quite justified in chopping people up with their machinery; they were utterly undone, when it was hinted that perhaps they need not always make quite so much smoke.

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Indeed his reforming enthusiasm and his dislike of Parliament brought him under the lash of the *Edinburgh Review*, which severely censured him for his "persistent ridicule of the institutions of the country and the government under which we live."

It must not be forgotten that *Hard Times* is essentially a work in Social Philosophy; but Dickens was not a philosopher; he was a novelist who, from the vasty deep of his imagination could command spirits which would tear into pieces any school of philosophy that preached contentment with evil or injustice. If and when the philosopher came into opposition with the novelist, the former would be routed with heavy loss; but the combats may have accounted somewhat for that "used up" condition of which the author complains.

The characters—apart from characteristic exaggeration—are most skilfully drawn. Thomas Gradgrind of Coketown (which may or may not be Manchester—or near Manchester) is the protagonist of a system which would place facts in the forefront of the battle of life, and to which every human emotion must play a very subordinate part. Here he is, addressing the master of his model school.

"Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!"

This is Thomas Gradgrind:

Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything

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over. Thomas Gradgrind, sir—peremptorily Thomas—Thomas Gradgrind. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic.

His own family are of course educated in these iron-bound principles.

No little Gradgrind had ever seen a face in the moon; it was up in the moon before it could speak distinctly. No little Gradgrind had ever learnt the silly jingle, *Twinkle, twinkle little star*; how I wonder what you are! No little Gradgrind had ever known wonder on the subject, each little Gradgrind having at five years old dissected the Great Bear like a Professor Owen, and driven Charles's Wain like a locomotive engine-driver. No little Gradgrind had ever associated a cow in a field with that famous cow with the crumpled horn who tossed the dog who worried the cat who killed the rat who ate the malt, or with that yet more famous cow who swallowed Tom Thumb: it had never heard of those celebrities, and had only been introduced to a cow as a *graminivorous ruminating quadruped* with several stomachs.

How happily, in the presentment of this character, and in showing how vain a thing is man when he tries to repress human emotion and human sympathy, does Dickens illustrate the slowness and the exactness of the grinding of the mills of God. There is introduced to us a circus-proprietor—Sleary; an uneducated man, too fond of brandy and water; lamentably ignorant of any philosophy of facts and as unselfish a being as ever breathed. Yet it is Sleary, who, when young Tom Gradgrind is "wanted" for robbing Bounderby's bank, manages his escape; and his final words to Mr Gradgrind (whom he calls "Thquire"—the letter "S" presenting difficulties too great for him to overcome) are worth recalling:

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Thquire, thake handth, firtht and latht! Don't be croth with uth poor vagabondth. People mutht be amuthed. They can't be alwayth a-learning, not yet they can't be alwayth a-working, they an't made for it. You *mutht* have uth, Thquire. Do the withe thing and the kind thing too, and make the betht of uth; not the wurtht!

There are two characters of whom more than a passing word should be said—Stephen Blackpool and Rachel, both “hands” in Bounderby's mill. Their story is sweetly sad. They are devotedly attached to each other; but there is an obstacle to their union in the shape of Stephen's wife—a drunkard—and worse.

Such a woman! A disabled, drunken creature, barely able to preserve her sitting posture by steadying herself with one begrimed hand on the floor, while the other was so purposeless in trying to push away her tangled hair from her face, that it only blinded her the more with the dirt upon it. A creature so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy, that it was a shameful thing even to see her.

Not once but twenty times Stephen had gone home to find his home stripped bare, and his wife lying senseless on the floor. But for such as Stephen, in those days, there was no remedy.

In the love of Rachel and Stephen there is no taint of impurity. With patient fortitude they accept things as they are and live their lives, doing that which is right. And the knowledge that they are doing it is their only reward.

Altogether there are nine female characters in *Hard Times*. The important ones are Louisa Gradgrind, afterwards Mrs Bounderby, and Mrs Sparsit, Bounderby's house-keeper, the subject of this sketch. There is a Mrs Gradgrind, but she is a perfectly colourless creature, over-fed on a continuous diet of facts, and starved on an under-diet of love.

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'Tis a sad commentary on the perfection of the Gradgrind system to think that this poor lady only seemed to realise on her death-bed that there had been something missing throughout her life.

"But there is something—not an Ology at all—that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa. I don't know what it is. I have often sat with Sissy near me, and thought about it. I shall never get its name now. But your father may. It makes me restless. I want to write to him, to find out for God's sake, what it is. Give me a pen, give me a pen."

But her feeble hand never traced that letter, for even as she began to trace "words of wonderful no-meaning upon her wrappers . . . her always feeble and dim light went out and she took upon herself the dread solemnity of the sages and patriarchs."

Minor characters are the "Sissy" mentioned by Mrs Gradgrind—Sissy Jupe—a child of the circus, taken into the Gradgrind household, of which she becomes the light, and Mrs Pegler, who has the misfortune to be Bounderby's mother, paid by that worthy to keep out of the way so that he may the more freely lie about her.

A HIGHLY CONNECTED LADY.

Mrs Sparsit is Bounderby's housekeeper. He was fond of describing her as "a real gentlewoman," and of boasting of her being "highly connected"—which was true if it be accepted that to have had a husband who was a "Powler" on the mother's side, and to be a "Scadgers" on her father's side, is to be highly connected. She is now an elderly lady, with a "Coriolanian" style of nose and dense black eyebrows.

If Bounderby had been a Conqueror, and Mrs Sparsit a captive Princess whom he took about as a feature in his

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state-processions, he could not have made a greater flourish with her than he habitually did. Just as it belonged to his boastfulness to depreciate his own extraction, so it belonged to it to exalt Mrs Sparsit's. In the measure that he would not allow his own youth to have been attended by a single favourable circumstance, he brightened Mrs Sparsit's juvenile career with every possible advantage, and showered wagon-loads of early roses all over that lady's path. "And yet, sir," he would say, "how does it turn out after all? Why here she is at a hundred a year (I give her a hundred, which she is pleased to term handsome), keeping the house of Josiah Bounderby of Coketown!"

The following is the style of conversation with which the arrant humbug, humbugs himself :

"Well, ma'am, you must confess that you were born in the lap of luxury, yourself. Come, ma'am, you know you were born in the lap of luxury."

"I do not, sir," returned Mrs Sparsit with a shake of her head, "deny it."

Mr Bounderby was obliged to get up from table, and stand with his back to the fire, looking at her; she was such an enhancement of his position.

"And you were in crack society. Devilish high society," he said, warming his legs.

"It is true, sir," returned Mrs Sparsit, with an affectation of humility the very opposite of his, and therefore in no danger of jostling it.

"You were in the tiptop fashion, and all the rest of it," said Mr Bounderby.

"Yes, sir," returned Mrs Sparsit, with a kind of social widowhood upon her. "It is unquestionably true."

Mr Bounderby, bending himself at the knees, literally embraced his legs in his great satisfaction and laughed aloud.

MRS SPARSIT'S STAIRCASE

When Sissy Jupe first enters Bounderby's house, she omits, in her confusion, to curtsy to Mrs Sparsit, on which the blusterer says :

"Now, I tell you what, my girl. The name of that lady by the teapot is Mrs Sparsit. That lady acts as mistress of this house, and she is a highly connected lady. Consequently, if ever you come again into any room in this house, you will make a short stay in it if you don't behave towards that lady in your most respectful manner. Now, I don't care a button what you do to *me*, because I don't affect to be anybody. So far from having high connections I have no connections at all, and I come of the scum of the earth. But towards that lady, I do care what you do; and you shall do what is deferential and respectful, or you shall not come here."

A PROPOSAL AND A WEDDING.

In due process of time Bounderby (aged fifty) offers marriage to Louisa Gradgrind (aged twenty). The offer is conveyed by Mr Gradgrind to his daughter, who ascertains that she is not expected to love her suitor. As to the disparity in years, Mr Gradgrind says that virtually there is no disparity, because statistics prove that in the cases of marriages between people of unequal ages, in rather more than three-fourths of them, the bridegroom is the elder. So because she thinks it may be helpful to her brother Tom—a perfect whelp—who is in Bounderby's bank, and because Bounderby is willing to take her not expecting any love from her, she agrees to marry him.

It is not to be supposed that even a highly connected elderly lady acting as housekeeper to a wealthy vulgarian had never thought of the possibilities of becoming Mrs Bounderby. Whether Bounderby had any suspicion as to this is not stated, but he certainly felt that the crumpled rose-leaf in his feather-bed of satisfaction at Louisa's acceptance, was the necessity for imparting the news to Mrs

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Sparsit. How to do it he did not know, neither could he imagine how she would take it.

Whether she would instantly depart, bag and baggage, to Lady Scadders, or would positively refuse to budge from the premises; whether she would be plaintive or abusive, tearful or tearing; whether she would break her heart, or break the looking-glass; Mr Bounderby could not at all foresee.

On his way home, on the evening he set aside for this momentous purpose, he took the precaution of stepping into a chemist's shop and buying a bottle of the very strongest smelling-salts. "By George!" said Mr Bounderby, "if she takes it in the fainting way, I'll have the skin off her nose, at all events!" But, in spite of being thus forearmed, he entered his own house with anything but a courageous air; and appeared before the object of his misgivings, like a dog who was conscious of coming direct from the pantry.

The lady is busily engaged in picking holes in a piece of cambric, and takes so much interest in her work that it is some minutes before she looks up. Then and thus Bounderby:

"Mrs Sparsit, ma'am," said Mr Bounderby, putting his hands in his pockets, and assuring himself with his right hand that the cork of the little bottle was ready for use, "I have no occasion to say to you, that you are not only a lady born and bred, but a devilish sensible woman."

"Sir," returned the lady, "this is indeed not the first time that you have honoured me with similar expressions of your good opinion."

"Mrs Sparsit, ma'am," said Mr Bounderby, "I am going to astonish you."

"Yes, sir?" returned Mrs Sparsit, interrogatively, and in the most tranquil manner possible. She generally wore mittens, and she now laid down her work, and smoothed those mittens.

MRS SPARSIT'S STAIRCASE

"I am going, ma'am," said Bounderby, "to marry Tom Gradgrind's daughter."

"Yes, sir," returned Mrs Sparsit. "I hope you may be happy, Mr Bounderby. Oh, indeed I hope you may be happy, sir!" And she said it with such great condescension as well as with such great compassion for him, that Bounderby—far more disconcerted than if she had thrown her work-box at the mirror, or swooned on the hearth-rug—corked up the smelling-salts tight in his pocket, and thought, "Now, confound this woman, who could have ever guessed that she would take it in this way!"

"I wish with all my heart, sir," said Mrs Sparsit, in a highly superior manner; somehow she seemed in a moment, to have established a right to pity him ever afterwards; "that you may be in all respects very happy."

As Mrs Sparsit cannot think of living with the newly married pair it is arranged that she shall live at Bounderby's Bank, receiving the same "annual compliment" (she scorns to speak of "terms") and servants to wait upon her and a night porter to guard her.

And the wedding takes place a few weeks later, and Bounderby makes a Bounderby speech—full of lies and brag.

A BANK FAIRY—OR DRAGON.

Behold then Mrs Sparsit settled at the Bank, over which she sheds—in her own opinion—a feminine and aristocratic grace; and considers herself the Bank Fairy. It might astonish her to know that the townspeople rather regard her as the Bank Dragon. Although a year has elapsed since Bounderby married, she has never released him from her determined pity for a moment and always greets him "with the sympathising recognition appropriate to a Victim."

One evening after banking hours she is seated in the board-room and taking her tea, and discussing with Bitzer, the night-porter, the goings on of the "Hands" and their uniting and leaguings and engaging to stand by one another;

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as to which she opines, with much severity that it is much to be regretted that the *united* masters permit any such *class-combinations*. (The curious will note that this world changes so little, that though over seventy years have passed since Dickens thus wrote, there are still thousands of Mrs Sparsits (of both sexes) who habitually ask the same question.)

During this conversation Bitzer notices that a stranger is knocking at the bank door. Now as this stranger turns out to be the villain of the piece, and as his advent is the forerunner of the ultimate and utter discomfiture of Mrs Sparsit, I must give some little account of him.

JEM HARTHOUSE AND THE "FACT FELLOWS."

Among the members of Parliament, not of, but with the Gradgrind school, was a fine gentleman of good family and appearance, and with a happy turn of humour,

. . . which had told immensely with the House of Commons on the occasion of his entertaining it with his (and the Board of Directors') view of a railway accident, in which the most careful officers ever known, employed by the most liberal managers ever heard of, assisted by the finest mechanical contrivances ever devised, the whole in action on the best line ever constructed, had killed five people and wounded thirty-two, by a casualty without which the excellence of the whole system would have been positively incomplete. Among the slain was a cow, and among the scattered articles unowned, a widow's cap. And the honorable member had so tickled the House (which has a delicate sense of humour) by putting the cap on the cow, that it became impatient of any serious reference to the Coroner's Inquest, and brought the railway off with Cheers and Laughter.

(Dickens certainly did not hide his hatred of, and his contempt for, Parliament.)

This member had a younger brother of much better

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appearance who had tried several things in life and found them a bore. With a view to finding a settlement for him his brother introduced him to the "hard Fact fellows," who approved of him; and Gradgrind sent him to Coketown with a letter of introduction to the great Bounderby. His name was James (Jem) Harthouse.

It is this gentleman whom Bitzer has seen; and it is he who is now seated in the Board Room ("five-and-thirty, good-looking, good figure, good teeth, good voice, good breeding, well-dressed, dark hair, bold eyes," sums up Mrs Sparsit) talking to the Bank Fairy—or Dragon, of Bounderby.

"I think he married Gradgrind's daughter?"

"Yes," said Mrs Sparsit, suddenly compressing her mouth, "he had that—honour."

"The lady is quite a philosopher, I am told?"

"Indeed, sir," said Mrs Sparsit. "*Is* she?"

"Excuse my impertinent curiosity," pursued the stranger, fluttering over Mrs Sparsit's eyebrows, with a propitiatory air, "but you know the family, and know the world. I am about to know the family, and may have much to do with them. Is the lady so very alarming? Her father gives her such a portentously hard-headed reputation, that I have a burning desire to know. Is she absolutely unapproachable? Repellantly and stunningly clever? I see, by your meaning smile, you think not. You have poured balm into my anxious soul. As to age, now. Forty? Five-and-thirty?"

Mrs Sparsit laughed outright. "A chit," said she. "Not twenty when she was married."

"I give you my honour, that I never was so astonished in my life!"

It really did seem to impress him, to the utmost extent of his capacity of being impressed. He looked at his informant for full a quarter of a minute, and appeared to have the surprise in his mind all the time. "I assure you," he then said, much exhausted, "that the father's manner

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prepared me for a grim and stony maturity. I am obliged to you, of all things, for correcting so absurd a mistake. Pray excuse my intrusion. Many thanks. Good day!"

On his departure, Mrs Sparsit sits at the window idly.

She sat at the window, when the sun began to sink behind the smoke; she sat there, when the smoke was burning red, when the colour faded from it, when darkness seemed to rise slowly out of the ground, and creep upward, upward, up to the house-tops, up the church steeple, up to the summits of the factory chimneys, up to the sky. Without a candle in the room, Mrs Sparsit sat at the window, with her hands before her, not thinking much of the sounds of evening; the whooping of boys, the barking of dogs, the rumbling of wheels, the steps and voices of passengers, the shrill street cries, the clogs upon the pavement when it was their hour for going by, the shutting-up of shop-shutters. Not until the light porter announced that her nocturnal sweetbread was ready, did Mrs Sparsit arouse herself from her reverie, and convey her dense black eyebrows—by that time creased with meditation, as if they needed ironing out—up-stairs.

"Oh, you Fool!" said Mrs Sparsit, when she was alone at her supper. Whom she meant, she did not say; but she could scarcely have meant the sweetbread.

But we know whom she means. Bounderby! And from that moment she commences, in her mind, the erection of a mighty staircase, with a dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom. And she who is to descend it is Louisa—and he who is to conduct her is Harthouse. A highly connected lady indeed!

THE WHELP AND HIS SISTER.

Mr Harthouse leaves his letter of introduction with Mr Bounderby, who immediately calls on him at his hotel. The banker having placed himself on terms of equality (as he

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calls it) by describing himself as "a bit of dirty riff-raff—a genuine scrap of tag, rag and bobtail," invites him to his home to see his wife—"Tom Gradgrind's daughter." Here is Harthouse's first impression of her :

There presently entered to them the most remarkable girl Mr James Harthouse had ever seen. She was so constrained, and yet so careless; so reserved, and yet so watchful; so cold and proud, and yet so sensitively ashamed of her husband's braggart humility—from which she shrunk as if every example of it were a cut or a blow; that it was quite a new sensation to observe her. In face she was no less remarkable than in manner. Her features were handsome; but their natural play was so locked up, that it seemed impossible to guess at their genuine expression. Utterly indifferent, perfectly self-reliant, never at a loss, and yet never at her ease, with her figure in company with them there, and her mind apparently quite alone—it was of no use "going in" yet awhile to comprehend this girl, for she baffled all penetration.

Yes! Mrs Sparsit is right in her staircase building. The bored man henceforth has an object in life—the pursuit of his host's wife; but is there nothing to move that face, is his thought as he sits at dinner with them—the table being laid for four, and only three being present?

By Jupiter, there is! Enter Tom, and her face breaks into a beautiful smile.

At least he has a key to a small postern-gate in the walls of an apparently impregnable castle. The brother is the only thing for whom she cares.

Is it quite an accident that, on leaving, he professed uncertainty as to the whereabouts of his hotel? Is it quite unexpected that the whelp at once proffers his services as guide? And can he do anything less than ask that guide in to take a cooling drink—more cool than weak—and to smoke some rare tobacco. Under these combined influences it is not surprising that the whelp becomes very confidential and explains that his sister Loo does not care for Bounderby.

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"She never had a lover, and the governor proposed old Bounderby, and she took him."

"Very dutiful in your interesting sister," said Mr James Harthouse.

"Yes, but she wouldn't have been as dutiful, and it would not have come off as easily," returned the whelp, "if it hadn't been for me."

The tempter merely lifted his eyebrows; but the whelp was obliged to go on.

"I persuaded her," he said, with an edifying air of superiority. "I was stuck into old Bounderby's bank (where I never wanted to be), and I knew I should get into scrapes there, if she put old Bounderby's pipe out; so I told her my wishes, and she came into them. She would do anything for me. It was very game of her, wasn't it?"

After more cooling drinks and rare tobacco, Tom imparts further confidences, and then, none too sober, goes home to bed.

If he had had any sense of what he had done that night, and had been less of a whelp and more of a brother, he might have turned short on the road, might have gone down to the ill-smelling river that was dyed black, might have gone to bed in it for good and all, and have curtained his head for ever with its filthy waters.

So well had the great gospel of "Facts" trained this son of Gradgrind!

THE FACE CHANGES FOR HARTHOUSE.

With such a powerful lever as the interest of the only thing she loves at his disposal, Mr Harthouse is not slow in using it. Bounderby has taken possession of a house and grounds fifteen miles out of Coketown, accessible within a mile or so by rail; and here he invites Harthouse to take up his abode and stable his horses.

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He accepts; and one sultry summer evening finds Louisa in her favourite resort—an opening in a dark wood. He mentions Tom, and immediately her colour brightens and she turns to him with a look of interest. He asks as to the possibility of the whelp gambling? She assents. Of his losing? Yes! Of the improbability of his making a confidant of his father? Not likely! Of Bounderby? Not at all likely! Then he had borrowed of her? Yes!

“When I married, I found that my brother was even at that time heavily in debt. Heavily for him, I mean. Heavily enough to oblige me to sell some trinkets. They were no sacrifice. I sold them very willingly. I attached no value to them. They were quite worthless to me.”

Either she saw in his face that he knew, or she only feared in her conscience that he knew, that she spoke of some of her husband's gifts. She stopped, and reddened again. If he had not known it before, he would have known it then, though he had been a much duller man than he was.

“Since then, I have given my brother, at various times, what money I could spare: in short, what money I have had. Confiding in you at all, on the faith of the interest you profess for him, I will not do so by halves. Since you have been in the habit of visiting here, he has wanted in one sum as much as a hundred pounds. I have not been able to give it to him. I have felt uneasy for the consequences of his being so involved, but I have kept these secrets until now, when I trust them to your honour. I have held no confidence with anyone, because—you anticipated my reason just now.” She abruptly broke off.

How clever of the tempter to suggest that poor Tom was the victim of the Gradgrind system of education! and that her husband's fine bluff independence was hardly of the character to invite confidence! Was not that her case too?

The next step is easy—to offer to help Tom; rendered all the easier by the opportune appearance of Tom at that

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moment. Inviting the young gentleman's confidence, that estimable brother admits being in a horrible mess. Listen to the despicable whelp's outburst :

"What is a fellow to do for money, and where *am* I to look for it, if not to my sister?"

He was almost crying, and scattered the buds about by dozens. Mr Harthouse took him persuasively by the coat.

"But, my dear Tom, if your sister has not got it—"

"Not got it, Mr Harthouse? I don't say she has got it. I may have wanted more than she was likely to have got. But then she ought to get it. She could get it. It's of no use pretending to make a secret of matters now, after what I have told you already; you know she didn't marry old Bounderby for her own sake, or for his sake, but for my sake. Then why doesn't she get what I want, out of him, for my sake? She is not obliged to say what she is going to do with it; she is sharp enough; she could manage to coax it out of him, if she chose. Then why doesn't she choose, when I tell her of what consequence it is? But no. There she sits in his company like a stone, instead of making herself agreeable and getting it easily. I don't know what you may call this, but *I* call it unnatural conduct."

It is to Harthouse's credit that he has a strong inclination to pitch this cur into an adjacent piece of ornamental water. But he represses it and suavely offers to become his banker.

Tom turns very white indeed. "For God's sake don't talk about bankers," he gasps. It is too late now to avail himself of the offer; but he is very grateful.

But he promises to soften towards his sister—to be a more loving and agreeable brother. And when they go indoors he kisses her, and makes her a pretty little speech.

After that there is a smile upon Louisa's face for someone else. The face has changed. Alas!

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DESCENDING THE STAIRCASE.

There has been a robbery at the bank; only £150, but, as Bounderby says, it might have been £20,000. Small as is the amount, the affair has acted on Mrs Sparsit's nerves; and the ukase goes forth that that lady is to recuperate at the Bounderby Retreat.

Arriving there she still plays her great card—her determination to pity her employer.

But Mrs Sparsit's greatest point, first and last, was her determination to pity Mr Bounderby. There were occasions when in looking at him she was involuntarily moved to shake her head, as who would say, "Alas poor Yorick!" After allowing herself to be betrayed into these evidences of emotion, she would force a lambent brightness, and would be fitfully cheerful, and would say, "You have still good spirits, sir, I am thankful to find"; and would appear to hail it as a blessed dispensation that Mr Bounderby bore up as he did. One idiosyncrasy for which she often apologized, she found it excessively difficult to conquer. She had a curious propensity to call Mrs Bounderby "Miss Gradgrind," and yielded to it some three or four score times in the course of the evening. Her repetition of this mistake covered Mrs Sparsit with modest confusion; but indeed, she said, it seemed so natural to say Miss Gradgrind: whereas, to persuade herself that the young lady whom she had had the happiness of knowing from a child could be really and truly Mrs Bounderby, she found almost impossible. It was a further singularity of this remarkable case, that the more she thought about it, the more impossible it appeared; "the differences," she observed, "being such."

Artful Mrs Sparsit. After dinner she suggests a game of backgammon—observing casually that "Miss Gradgrind" takes no interest in the game.

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They played near a window, opening on the garden. It was a fine night : not moonlight, but sultry and fragrant. Louisa and Mr Harthouse strolled out into the garden, where their voices could be heard in the stillness, though not what they said. Mrs Sparsit, from her place at the backgammon board, was constantly straining her eyes to pierce the shadows without. "What's the matter, ma'am?" said Mr Bounderby; "you don't see a Fire, do you?" "Oh dear no, sir," returned Mrs Sparsit, "I was thinking of the dew." "What have you got to do with the dew, ma'am?" said Mr Bounderby. "It's not myself, sir," returned Mrs Sparsit, "I am fearful of Miss Gradgrind's taking cold." "She never takes cold," said Mr Bounderby. "Really, sir?" said Mrs Sparsit. And was affected with a cough in her throat.

The game of this dear lady is to effect a breach between husband and wife and to throw the latter as much as possible into the company of Harthouse. She succeeds only too well. One morning at breakfast when she contrives to make Bounderby think he is a martyr, Louisa said :

"What is the matter with you? What has given you offence?"

"Offence!" repeated Bounderby. "Do you suppose if there was any offence given me, I shouldn't name it, and request to have it corrected? I am a straightforward man, I believe. I don't go beating about for side-winds."

"I suppose no one ever had occasion to think you too diffident, or too delicate," Louisa answered him composedly. "I have never made that objection to you, either as a child or as a woman. I don't understand what you would have."

"Have?" returned Mr Bounderby. "Nothing. Otherwise, don't you, Loo Bounderby, know thoroughly well that I, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, would have it?"

She looked at him, as he struck the table and made the teacups ring, with a proud colour in her face that was a

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new change, Mr Harthouse thought. "You are incomprehensible this morning," said Louisa. "Pray take no further trouble to explain yourself. I am not curious to know your meaning. What does it matter?"

But from this day, the Sparsit action upon Mr Bounderby threw Louisa and James Harthouse more together, and strengthened the dangerous alienation from her husband and confidence against him with another, into which she had fallen by degrees so fine that she could not retrace them if she tried. But whether she ever tried or no, lay hidden in her own closed heart.

NEARING THE PIT OF SHAME.

Mrs Sparsit's stay at the Bounderby Retreat lengthens into several weeks.

During the whole term of this recess from the guardianship of the Bank, Mrs Sparsit was a pattern of consistency; continuing to take such pity on Mr Bounderby to his face, as is rarely taken on man, and to call his portrait a Noodle to *its* face, with the greatest acrimony and contempt.

On the day prior to her departure the banker invites her in the future to spend her week-ends there, to which she readily assents.

It became the business of Mrs Sparsit's life, to look up at her staircase, and to watch Louisa coming down. Sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, sometimes several steps at one bout, sometimes stopping, never turning back. If she had once turned back, it might have been the death of Mrs Sparsit in spleen and grief.

She had been descending steadily, to the day, and on the day, when Mr Bounderby issued the weekly invitation recorded above. Mrs Sparsit was in good spirits, and inclined to be conversational.

Mrs Sparsit saw James Harthouse come and go; she

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heard of him here and there; she saw the changes of the face he had studied; she, too, remarked to a nicety how and when it clouded, how and when it cleared; she kept her black eyes wide open, with no touch of pity, with no touch of compunction, all absorbed in interest. In the interest of seeing her, ever drawing, with no hand to stay her, nearer and nearer to the bottom of this new Giant's Staircase.

With all her deference for Mr Bounderby as contra-distinguished from his portrait, Mrs Sparsit had not the smallest intention of interrupting the descent. Eager to see it accomplished, and yet patient, she waited for the last fall, as for the ripeness and fulness of the harvest of her hopes. Hushed in expectancy, she kept her wary gaze upon the stairs; and seldom so much as darkly shook her right mitten (with her fist in it), at the figure coming down.

Separated from her staircase, all the week, by the length of iron road dividing Coketown from the country-house, she yet maintained her cat-like observation of Louisa, through her husband, through her brother, through James Harthouse, through the outsides of letters and packets, through everything animate and inanimate that at any time went near the stairs. "Your foot on the last step, my lady," said Mrs Sparsit, apostrophizing the descending figure, with the aid of her threatening mitten, "and all your art shall never blind me."

THE BOTTOM STEP.

Harthouse is away in Yorkshire shooting. Bounderby is going to London—but that needs make no difference to Mrs Sparsit's usual visit. By clever cross-examination of the whelp she ascertains that Harthouse is returning to Coketown that week-end and has appointed to meet him at the station; so she sends a message to Louisa that she is not very well and will remain at the bank. She follows Tom to the station but Harthouse does not turn up. At once she is

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inspired by the knowledge that this is but a device to keep Tom out of the way and that Harthouse is at that moment with Louisa. Simultaneously with that thought, she dresses and hurries to the Bounderby Retreat.

She is right. Making her way to Louisa's favourite spot, the opening in a dark wood, she comes upon them.

Low voices close at hand. His voice and hers. The appointment *was* a device to keep the brother away! There they were yonder, by the felled tree.

Bending low among the dewy grass, Mrs Sparsit advanced closer to them. She drew herself up, and stood behind a tree, like Robinson Crusoe in his ambuscade against the savages; so near to them that at a spring, and that no great one, she could have touched them both. He was there secretly, and had not shown himself at the house. He had come on horseback, and must have passed through the neighbouring fields; for his horse was tied to the meadow side of the fence, within a few paces.

"My dearest love," said he, "what could I do? Knowing you were alone, was it possible that I could stay away?"

"You may hang your head, to make yourself the more attractive; *I* don't know what they see in you when you hold it up," thought Mrs Sparsit; "but you little think, my dearest love, whose eyes are on you!"

That she hung her head, was certain. She urged him to go away, she commanded him to go away; but she neither turned her face to him, nor raised it. Yet it was remarkable that she sat as still as ever the amiable woman in ambuscade had seen her sit, at any period in her life. Her hands rested in one another, like the hands of a statue; and even her manner of speaking was not hurried.

Amid the din of heavy rain among the leaves and the mutterings of a coming thunder-storm, Mrs Sparsit hears an appointment made for somewhere (she cannot catch where) that night—sees Harthouse ride away—sees Louisa enter the house—sees her coming out of the house, hastily

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cloaked and muffled, and stealing away. At last! The wife elopes! She has fallen to the lowermost stair and is swallowed up in the gulf. So, though Mrs Sparsit's white stocking are of many colours, green predominating; though prickly things are in her shoes; though caterpillars are slinging themselves from various parts of her dress and rills run from her bonnet on to her Roman nose she follows the guilty wife. Follows her to the station, and watches her enter a train for Coketown and then gets into it herself.

Though her teeth chattered in her head from wet and cold, Mrs Sparsit exulted hugely. The figure had plunged down the precipice, and she felt herself, as it were, attending on the body. Could she, who had been so active in the getting up of the funeral triumph, do less than exult? "She will be at Coketown long before him," thought Mrs Sparsit, "though his horse is never so good. Where will she wait for him? And where will they go together? Patience. We shall see."

But she does not see. She is a minute too late in getting out and when she gets to Louisa's carriage it is empty.

Wet through and through: with her feet squelching and squashing in her shoes whenever she moved; with a rash of rain upon her classical visage; with a bonnet like an over-ripe fig; with all her clothes spoiled; with damp impressions of every button, string, and hook-and-eye she wore, printed off upon her highly connected back; with a stagnant verdure on her general exterior, such as accumulates on an old park fence in a mouldy lane; Mrs Sparsit had no resource but to burst into tears of bitterness and say, "I have lost her!"

THE PIT AVOIDED.

In a dreadful state of dishevelment, suffering from a violent cold, her voice reduced to a whisper, Mrs Sparsit goes to London and runs her patron to earth at his hotel;

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where she tells him her news and faints. Being brought to by somewhat violent methods, Bounderby hustles her into a fast train to Coketown.

Regarded as a classical ruin, Mrs Sparsit was an interesting spectacle on her arrival at her journey's end; but considered in any other light, the amount of damage she had by that time sustained was excessive, and impaired her claims to admiration. Utterly heedless of the wear and tear of her clothes and constitution, and adamant to her pathetic sneezes, Mr Bounderby immediately crammed her into a coach, and bore her off to Stone Lodge.

"Now, Tom Gradgrind," said Bounderby, bursting into his father-in-law's room late at night; "here's a lady here—Mrs Sparsit—you know Mrs Sparsit—who has something to say to you that will strike you dumb."

That unfortunate lady hereupon essaying to offer testimony, without any voice and with painful gestures expressive of an inflamed throat, became so aggravating and underwent so many facial contortions, that Mr Bounderby, unable to bear it, seized her by the arm and shook her.

"If you can't get it out, ma'am," said Bounderby, "leave *me* to get it out. This is not a time for a lady, however highly connected, to be totally inaudible, and seemingly swallowing marbles. Tom Gradgrind, Mrs Sparsit latterly found herself, by accident, in a situation to overhear a conversation out of doors between your daughter and your precious gentleman friend, Mr James Harthouse."

"Indeed!" said Mr Gradgrind.

"Ah! Indeed!" cried Bounderby. "And in that conversation——"

"It is not necessary to repeat its tenor, Bounderby. I know what passed."

"You do? Perhaps," said Bounderby, starting with all his might at his so quiet and assuasive father-in-law, "you know where your daughter is at the present time!"

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"Undoubtedly. She is here."

"Here?"

"My dear Bounderby, let me beg you to restrain these loud outbreaks, on all accounts. Louisa is here. The moment she could detach herself from that interview with the person of whom you speak, and whom I deeply regret to have been the means of introducing to you, Louisa hurried here, for protection. I myself had not been at home many hours, when I received her—here, in this room. She hurried by the train to town, she ran from town to this house through a raging storm, and presented herself before me in a state of distraction. Of course, she has remained here ever since."

Yes, that is so. Louisa could only get rid of Harthouse by promising to meet him later on and had gone straight to her father's. Her feet had reached the bottom step of the Sparsit staircase—had hovered over the pit of shame—and then, by a desperate effort—for the man was dear to her—had avoided it and all Mrs Sparsit's careful planning was brought to nought.

EXIT MRS SPARSIT.

Of course Bounderby took an early opportunity of dismissing Mrs Sparsit. Of course he did it blusteringly and bullyingly; and equally of course the lady got in the last word and scored very neatly.

"You can take your own time for going, ma'am; but perhaps in the meanwhile, it will be more agreeable to a lady of your powers of mind, to eat her meals by herself, and not to be intruded upon. I really ought to apologise to you—being only Josiah Bounderby of Coketown—for having stood in your light so long."

"Pray don't name it, sir," returned Mrs Sparsit. "If that portrait could speak, sir—but it has the advantage over the original of not possessing the power of com-

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mitting itself and disgusting others—it would testify, that a long period has elapsed since I first habitually addressed it as the picture of a Noodle. Nothing that a Noodle does, can awaken surprise or indignation; the proceedings of a Noodle can only inspire contempt.”

So exit Mrs Sparsit—with all the *honours*—from Bounderby’s. Had she any thought of lost honour? We can hope that at least. We can also hope fervently that no further opportunities would be vouchsafed to such as she, of driving young girls down the slope of shame.

VII

MADAME DEFARGE. (From *A Tale of Two Cities*)

EXPLANATION OF CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN THIS SKETCH.

Carton, Sydney—A barrister of dissolute habits, and a great hero.

Cruncher, Jeremiah—Porter at Tellson's Bank and "Resurrection man."

Darnay, Charles—Assumed name of the Marquis de St. Evrémonde; husband of Lucie Manette.

Defarge, Ernest—Keeper of wine shop in Saint Antoinnes.

Defarge, Thérèse—His wife.

Jacques One, Two, Three, Four—French Revolutionists.

Lorry, Jarvis—Confidential clerk to Tellson's Bank.

Manette, Dr Alexandre—Prisoner of the Bastille; victim of the St. Evrémondés.

Manette, Lucie—His daughter.

Pross, Miss—Her nurse.

Pross, Solomon—Her brother, *alias* John Barsad, English spy; afterwards French spy and turnkey in the Conciergerie.

Vengeance, The—A woman French Revolutionist; the drummer of St. Antoinnes.

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A Tale of Two Cities first appeared in *All the Year Round*, April to November, 1859, and was published in book form in the December of the same year. *All the Year Round* was a new venture to take the place of *Household Words*, afterwards incorporated with it. That would be a fortunate magazine to-day which could start its career with such a splendid story as *A Tale of Two Cities*. More fortunate still if it could find such literary giants as Charles Reade, writing essays on the abuses that existed in our prisons and madhouses (afterward utilised in *It's Never Too Late to Mend* and *Hard Cash*), as Wilkie Collins, and Lord Lytton, whose *Strange Story* first appeared in its columns.

A Tale of Two Cities is divided into three periods: 1775, 1780, and 1792. The first period deals with the journey of Jarvis Lorry (of the great banking house of Tellson & Co.) to France to seek out a certain French physician, Alexandre Manette, secretly imprisoned in the Bastille for eighteen years under a *lettre de cachet*, but now at liberty somewhere in Paris. Through the agency of Ernest Defarge, a wine-shop keeper in the suburb of St. Antoine, he finds him in a garret—mad—making and mending shoes. He is brought to England and gradually his reason is rehabilitated.

The second period deals with the trial of one, Charles Darnay, a French Refugee in England, for Treason. Darnay is the nephew of the Marquis de St. Evrémonde, and is heir to his uncle's estates; but he has renounced his patrimony and has earned a modest livelihood as a teacher of French in England. After his acquittal, dramatically obtained by reason of his likeness to Sydney Carton, he frequents the house of the Manettes and subsequently marries Lucie.

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The third period gives us a wonderfully realistic picture of Paris in the time of the Terror. Darnay has left England for Paris—unknown to his wife—called thither by a sense of duty to a former servant of the Evrémonde family, one Gabelle, who is like to lose his head for the crime of having been tax-collector to an aristocrat, unless Darnay intervenes. Of Darnay's arrest, of his two trials before the "Terror" Tribunal, of his acquittal at the first trial (by the influence of Dr Manette), of his condemnation at the second (by the production of a secret document written by Dr Manette when a prisoner of the Bastille—produced by Defarge), of his sentence: "Death in twenty-four hours," and of his escape engineered by Sydney Carton—I will deal later.

A careful perusal of this book will, I think, clearly establish that although it is essentially a tale of Paris, it is not essentially a tale of London. It is a tale of one City, not of two. What does it give us of London? A fine description of an Old Bailey trial—a description of a great Bank which we of to-day cannot visualise—a description of the mock-burial of a spy (a most important event in the ultimate dénouement)—a description of a night at the chambers of the bullying barrister, Stryver—a description of the home of the Manettes, of the successful courtship of Lucie by Darnay, and of the hopeless attachments of Sydney Carton. But these are not London. They are but incidents.

This omission of giving no indication of the state of London becomes the more remarkable when it is remembered that the first period of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1780) was the year of the Gordon Riots, when London was held to ransom, and the executive paralysed for a few days, by a mob of forty thousand men. I notice that one writer on this book says that Dickens describes comparatively peaceful London and turbulent, riotous Paris. The following paragraph from *Barnaby Rudge* will give some idea of London's "comparatively peaceful" state in 1780:

Upwards of two hundred had been shot dead in the streets. Two hundred and fifty more were lying, badly

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wounded, in the hospitals; of whom seventy or eighty died within a short time afterwards. A hundred were already in custody, and more were taken every hour. How many perished in the conflagrations, or by their own excesses, is unknown; but that numbers found a terrible grave in the hot ashes of the flames they had kindled, or crept into vaults and cellars to drink in secret or to nurse their sores, and never saw the light again, is certain. When the embers of the fires had been black and cold for many weeks, the labourers' spades proved this, beyond a doubt.

Seventy-two private houses and four strong jails were destroyed in the four great days of these riots.

Barnaby Rudge must account in some way for this silence as to London's condition in *A Tale of Two Cities*. The former work, published in 1841, had given such a strong, succinct account of the Gordon reign of Terror, that to tell it again would have been as a tale that was told.

That brings me to another point. G. K. Chesterton says that Dickens's work is not to be reckoned in novels at all. ". . . Always by characters, sometimes by groups, oftener by episodes; but never by novels. . . . His novels are simply lengths cut from the flowing and mixed substance called Dickens. . . . You cannot artistically divide the output in books." Chesterton also opines in his sometimes fantastic—but always convincing—manner, that there is no reason why some of the more superb characters should be in one novel more than another, and he instances Sam Weller wandering into *Nicholas Nickleby*, and Major Bagstock walking straight out of *Dombey & Son* into *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

A quaint conceit! But to my mind untenable. To me the characters are sacred to the book in which they appear. That is my faith, and, in the words of a celebrated politician: "I can none other."

But what a wonder book it would have been had the scenes in London during the Gordon Riots, and the scenes in Paris under the Terror, been brought under one cover. Eighteen

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years had elapsed between the writing of *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens was twenty-nine when he wrote the former and forty-six when he wrote the latter—one of his shortest novels, only about 135,000 words, as compared with the 280,000 of *Barnaby Rudge*. In its shortness, however, what incident—what description—what beauty—what pathos! A flawless gem, sparkling from a bewildering number of facets! Yet there are descriptive passages in *Barnaby Rudge* that, placed side by side with similar passages in *A Tale of Two Cities*, would not suffer by the comparison.

I will take one instance :

Barnaby Rudge

(The burning of the Hare-
dale Mansion)

It was not an easy task to draw off such a throng. If Bedlam gates had been flung open wide, there would not have issued forth such maniacs as the frenzy of that night had made. There were men there, who danced and trampled on the beds of flowers as though they trod down human enemies, and wrenched them from the stalks, like savages who twisted human necks. There were men who cast their lighted torches in the air, and suffered them to fall upon their heads and faces, blistering the skin with deep unseemly burns. There were men who rushed up to the

A Tale of Two Cities

(The Grindstone of the
Terror)

The grindstone had a double handle, and turning at it madly were two men, whose faces, as their long hair flapped back when the whirlings of the grindstone brought their faces up, were more horrible and cruel than the visages of the wildest savages in their most barbarous disguise. False eyebrows and false moustaches were stuck upon them, and their hideous countenances were all bloody and sweaty, and all awry with howling, and all staring and glaring with beastly excitement and want of sleep. As these ruffians turned and turned, their matted locks now flung

fire, and paddled in it with their hands as if in water; and others who were restrained by force from plunging in, to gratify their deadly longing. On the skull of one drunken lad—not twenty, by his looks—who lay upon the ground with a bottle to his mouth, the lead from the roof came streaming down in a shower of liquid fire, white hot; melting his head like wax. When the scattered parties were collected, men—living yet, but singed as with hot irons—were plucked out of the cellars, and carried off upon the shoulders of others, who strove to wake them as they went along, with ribald jokes, and left them, dead, in the passages of hospitals. But of all the howling throng not one learnt mercy from, nor sickened at, these sights; nor was the fierce, besotted, senseless rage of one man glutted.

forward over their eyes, now flung backward over their necks, some women held wine to their mouths that they might drink; and what with dropping blood, and what with dropping wine, and what with the stream of sparks struck out of the stone, all their wicked atmosphere seemed gore and fire. The eye could not detect one creature in the group free from the smear of blood. Shouldering one another to get next at the sharpening-stone, were men stripped to the waist, with the stain all over their limbs and bodies; men in all sorts of rags, with the stain upon those rags; men devilishly set off with spoils of women's lace and silk and ribbon, with the stain dyeing those trifles through and through. Hatchets, knives, bayonets, swords, all brought to be sharpened, were all red with it.

A Tale of Two Cities is a departure from Dickens's usual style, in that it is first and foremost a story of incident. Dickens himself describes it thus :

"I set myself the little task of making a picturesque story, rising in every chapter with characters true to nature, but whom the story should express more than

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they should express themselves by dialogue. I mean, in other words, that I fancied a story of incident might be written, pounding the characters in its own mortar, and beating their interest out of them."

No higher praise was ever given to any novel than that given by Mr Graham White, a great American critic. He said :

"The portrayal of the noble-minded castaway Carton makes it almost a peerless book in modern literature, and gives it a place among the highest examples of literary art. . . . There is not a grander, loftier figure than the self-wrecked, self-devoted Sydney Carton in literature or history; and the story itself is so noble in its spirit, so grand and graphic in its style, and filled with a pathos so profound and simple, that it deserves and will surely take a place among the great serious works of imagination."

The whole book, from cover to cover, is an eloquent sermon on the words of the Book Beautiful: "Greater love hath no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends." Not that I have any illusions as to Sydney Carton's feeling for Darnay! If he did not actively dislike him, he just tolerated him. She for whose sake he lay down his life was Darnay's wife, Lucie Manette; that superb sacrifice was committed in pursuance of a sacred promise at an interview with her prior to her marriage; an interview which for pathetic tenderness, can only find its parallel in his conversation with the little seamstress, his companion in the guillotine tumbil :

"The time will come, the time will not be long in coming, when new ties will be formed about you—ties that will bind you yet more tenderly and strongly to the home you so adorn—the dearest ties that will ever grace and gladden you. O Miss Manette, when the little picture

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of a happy father's face looks up in yours, when you see your own bright beauty springing up anew at your feet, think now and then that there is a man who would give his life, to keep a life you love beside you ! ”

So he went to his death faithful to that promise to keep the man she loved beside her ; died thinking, perhaps saying, these words which have the sweet sonorousness of Holy Writ itself :

“ It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done ; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known.”

Dickens has admitted his indebtedness to Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution*—a work I have never read. For this reason : I read *A Tale of Two Cities* when a lad—and incapable of judging of its wondrous beauty ; again, years later, when I thought I was able to do so. And often since. In these later readings I have imagined—rightly or wrongly—that the vintage of Carlyle, trodden in the wine-press of Dickens, was good enough for me. In that respect at least, I am the master of my fate.

Maybe Dickens owes something to Carlyle in his descriptions of the Terror, but the grand solitary central figure of Carton—which is in effect *A Tale of Two Cities*—is true Dickens. None but he could have so described this sad, wasted life :

“ The sun rose upon no sadder sight than the man of good abilities and good emotions, incapable of their directed exercise, incapable of his own help and his own happiness, sensible of the blight on him, and resigning himself to let it eat him away.”

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, although we have an unequalled description of the turbulent rebellion of a nation, devouring as an earthquake, and accompanied by such ruthless execu-

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tions—such wholesale slaughterings—as made the civilised world aghast—through it all the dominant factor is the still figure of Sydney Carton; sometimes silhouetted; sometimes full; but always strong and purposeful.

The mighty implements that Dickens uses to bring about his ends! The trial, at the Old Bailey, of Darnay—a perfect mosaic of human emotions and intensity—but a peg on which to hang the likeness of Carton—the “careless, slovenly, if not debauched,” looking barrister—to the prisoner; a likeness to be utilised years later in France with such dramatic effect. The burial of the spy, Roger Cly, the indignant crowd taking charge of the proceedings, the escape of the “chief mourner,” Barsad (another spy), the hilarious burial at St. Pancras; the midnight foray of Jerry Cruncher and other “resurrection men” on the cemetery, only to find the coffin full of bricks; all for the confusion of Barsad during the Terror and for the admission of Carton to the gaol in which Darnay is confined. The taking of the Bastile, an electrifying description of the irresistible might of that “forest of naked arms struggling in the air like shrivelled branches of trees in a winter wind” against the apparently impregnable Bastile with its deep ditches, double drawbridge, massive stone walls, eight great towers, cannon, and muskets; all but to lead Defarge to “One Hundred and Five North Tower,” where he shall find that terrible Manette manuscript which shall condemn Manette’s son-in-law to the guillotine.

The three important female characters in *A Tale of Two Cities* are Lucie Manette, Miss Pross and Madame Defarge. Of the first there is not much to be said beyond this: that she is a devoted, loving daughter, wife and mother. Miss Pross, Lucie’s fiercely adoring nurse, is a fine study. Apart from her love for Lucie, her belief in her rascally brother, Solomon, *alias* Barsad, English spy, French spy, prison “sheep” during the “Terror,” is real pathos and an example of the hunger of the sisterly soul for the love of “one of her own.” She sees no fault in this precious scoundrel. Bless her! and keep her blind to his defects. And bless her

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again that she, however unintentionally, puts a period to the activities of Madame Defarge.

Madame Defarge! A sister? Yes. A wife? Yes. A woman? Hardly. How can this cold fury, this phlegmatic knitter-away of men's lives, this embodiment of insensate hatred be described? She was thought to be—and hailed as—a patriot. She was nothing of the sort. All she saw in the Terror was a means of executing personal vengeance first on the particular family that had wronged her sister and brother, and then on the class to which that family belonged. When she hewed off the head of the Governor of the taken Bastile, when she had loosed Foulon (who had told the people to eat grass) to the mob, hungry for his blood, when she incited her husband to denounce the last of the Evrémondes—Darnay—she was just striking a blow on these Evrémondes who had seduced her sister and killed her brother. A human terror, in an orgy of Terror, without ruth or pity, she would even have glutted her vengeance on Darnay's wife and child.

JUSTICE TO MADAME DEFARGE.

Yet even to this tigress justice is due. Think of what had happened to her family—of the atrocities they had suffered at the hands of the Evrémondes. Her sister's husband—because he would not assent to the degradation of his wife—harnessed to a cart all day and up all night quieting the frogs that might otherwise have disturbed the Evrémondes' sleep. He died; and his wife was carried off. Her father, on hearing of this, literally broke his heart; and the younger brother, on finding his outraged sister, though a peasant, forced the Evrémonde to cross swords with him and was killed. Think of these happenings—put yourself in her place—and give to this awful woman just one kindly thought; and then leave her to God's justice.

It was Dr Manette whom the Evrémonde brothers sent for to minister to the dying brother and sister. It was his manuscript, found by Defarge in the Bastile "One Hundred

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and Five North Tower," that was read at the Tribunal and convicted Darnay—at his second trial—as a descendant of that hated family. What were Madame Defarge's feelings when these words of her long dead brother were read out in Court?;

"Marquis, in the days when all these things are to be answered for, I summon you, and yours to the last of your bad race, to answer for them. I mark this cross of blood upon you, as a sign that I do it. In the days when all these things are to be answered for, I summon your brother, the worst of the bad race, to answer for them separately. I mark this cross of blood upon him, as a sign that I do it."

And if the closing words of the fatal Manette document roused disinterested people to a frenzy, what effect must they have had upon the sister of the murdered brother—of the outraged sister?

"But now I believe that the mark of the red cross is fatal to them, and that they have no part in His mercies. And them and their descendants, to the last of their race, I, Alexandre Manette, unhappy prisoner, do this last night of the year 1767, in my unbearable agony, denounce to the times when all these things shall be answered for. I denounce them to Heaven and to earth."

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

Let us take a look at Monsieur and Madame Defarge, keepers of a wine-shop in the suburb of Saint Antoine in the year 1780, when Jarvis Lorry of Tellson's Bank goes to Paris with Lucie Manette to "recall to life" Dr Manette, now free after eighteen years' incarceration in the Bastile.

This wine-shop keeper was a bull-necked, martial-looking man of thirty, and he should have been of a hot temperament, for, although it was a bitter day, he wore

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no coat, but carried one slung over his shoulder. His shirt-sleeves were rolled up, too, and his brown arms were bare to the elbows. Neither did he wear anything more on his head than his own crisply-curling short dark hair. He was a dark man altogether, with good eyes and a good bold breadth between them. Good-humoured looking on the whole, but implacable-looking, too; evidently a man of a strong resolution and a set purpose; a man not desirable to be met, rushing down a narrow pass with a gulf on either side, for nothing would turn the man.

Madame Defarge, his wife, sat in the shop behind the counter as he came in. Madame Defarge was a stout woman of about his own age, with a watchful eye that seldom seemed to look at anything, a large hand heavily ringed, a steady face, strong features, and great composure of manner. There was a character about Madame Defarge, from which one might have predicted that she did not often make mistakes against herself in any of the reckonings over which she presided. Madame Defarge being sensitive to cold, was wrapped in fur, and had a quantity of bright shawl twined about her head, though not to the concealment of her large earrings. Her knitting was before her, but she had laid it down to pick her teeth with a toothpick. Thus engaged, with her right elbow supported by her left hand, Madame Defarge said nothing when her lord came in, but coughed just one grain of cough. This, in combination with the lifting of her darkly defined eyebrows over her toothpick by the breadth of a line, suggested to her husband that he would do well to look around the shop among the customers, for any new customer who had dropped in while he stepped over the way.

Yes, knitting—always knitting! Knitting with nimble fingers and steady eyebrows when her husband and Lorry and Lucie go out to see Dr Manette; knitting, leaning against the door-post when her husband returns and the others drive away.

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The time was to come when that knitting was to be put to dreadful use—when its stitches should mean men's lives.

EXTERMINATION FOR THE ST. EVRÉMONDES "REGISTERED."

The Marquis de St. Evrémonde on leaving a Court function has run over and killed a child and has tossed the maddened father a coin—which is flung back into his carriage. The father pursues the Marquis to his château and in the dead of night murders him. He is subsequently captured and hanged and the tale of his execution is brought to Defarge's wine shop by Jacques—a road-mender living at the village near the château.

"At midday, the roll of drums. Soldiers have marched into the prison in the night, and he is in the midst of many soldiers. He is bound as before, and in his mouth there is a gag—tied so, with a tight string, making him look almost as if he laughed." He suggested it, by creasing his face with his two thumbs, from the corners of his mouth to his ears. "On the top of the gallows is fixed the knife, blade upwards, with its point in the air. He is hanged there forty feet high—and is left hanging, poisoning the water."

This account is given to Defarge and three friends—all terming themselves "Jacques."

The road-mender continues :

"It is frightful, messieurs. How can the women and children draw water ! Who can gossip of an evening, under that shadow ! Under it, have I said ? When I left the village, Monday evening as the sun was going to bed, and looked back from the hill, the shadow struck across the church, across the mill, across the prison—seemed to strike across the earth, messieurs, to where the sky rests upon it !"

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MONSIEUR'S OPINION OF MADAME.

Then comes the verdict :

"How say you, Jacques?" demanded Number One.
"To be registered?"

"To be registered, as doomed to destruction," returned Defarge.

"Magnificent!" croaked the man with the craving (for gnawing his fingers).

"The chateau, and all the race?" inquired the first.

"The chateau and all the race," returned Defarge.
"Extermination."

The hungry man repeated in a rapturous croak, "Magnificent!" and began gnawing another finger.

"Are you sure," asked Jacques Two of Defarge, "that no embarrassment can arise from our manner of keeping the register? Without doubt it is safe, for no one beyond ourselves can decipher it; but shall we always be able to decipher it—or, I ought to say, will she?"

"Jacques," returned Defarge, drawing himself up, "if madame my wife undertook to keep the register in her memory alone, she would not lose a word of it—not a syllable of it. Knitted in her own stitches and her own symbols, it will always be as plain to her as the sun. Confide in Madame Defarge. It would be easier for the weakest poltroon that lives to erase himself from existence, than to erase one letter of his name or crimes from the knitted register of Madame Defarge.

SAINT ANTOINE IS WELL-INFORMED.

After the wine shop is closed for the night the Defarges while out walking have a conversation. Says Madame Defarge to her husband :

"Say then, my friend; what did Jacques of the police tell thee?"

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"Very little to-night, but all he knows. There is another spy commissioned for our quarter. There may be many more, for all that he can say, but he knows of one."

"Eh, well!" said Madame Defarge, raising her eyebrows with a cool business air. "It is necessary to register him. How do they call that man?"

"He is English."

"So much the better. His name?"

"Barsad," said Defarge, making it French by pronunciation. But he had been so careful to get it accurately, that he then spelled it with perfect correctness.

"Barsad," repeated madame. "Good. Christian name?"

"John."

"John Barsad," repeated madame, after murmuring it once to herself. "Good. His appearance; is it known?"

"Age, about forty years; height, about five feet nine; black hair; complexion dark; generally, rather handsome visage; eyes dark, face thin, long, and sallow; nose aquiline, but not straight, having a peculiar inclination towards the left cheek; expression, therefore, sinister."

"Eh, my faith. It is a portrait!" said madame, laughing. "He shall be registered to-morrow."

Observe—another Jacques; and he of the police too. Little did the authorities dream, little did the butterfly court think, that these tatterdemalions of Saint Antoine had *their* secret service, and had even succeeded in corrupting some of the police.

PHILOSOPHY AND PROPHECY.

Defarge is a bit a-weary that night; a little doubtful as to the ultimate triumph of the cause for which he is so assiduously working. His wife notices it. This conversation gives illuminating insight into the ferocious implacability of her disposition.

"You are faint of heart to-night, my dear!"

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"Well, then," said Defarge, as if a thought were wrung out of his breast, "it is a long time."

"It is a long time," repeated his wife; "and when is it not a long time? Vengeance and retribution require a long time; it is the rule."

"It does not take a long time to strike a man with lightning," said Defarge.

"How long," demanded madame composedly, "does it take to make and store the lightning? Tell me."

Defarge raised his forehead thoughtfully, as if there were something in that too.

"It does not take a long time," said madame, "for an earthquake to swallow a town. Eh, well! Tell me how long it takes to prepare the earthquake?"

"A long time, I suppose," said Defarge.

"But when it is ready, it takes place, and grinds to pieces everything before it. In the meantime, it is always preparing, though it is not seen or heard. This is your consolation. Keep it."

She tied a knot with flashing eyes, as if it throttled a foe.

"I tell thee," said madame, extending her right hand, for emphasis, "that although it is a long time on the road, it is on the road and coming. I tell thee it never retreats, and never stops. I tell thee it is always advancing. Look around and consider the lives of all the world that we know, consider the faces of all the world that we know, consider the rage and discontent to which the *Jacquerie* addresses itself with more and more of certainty every hour. Can such things last? Bah! I mock you."

"My brave wife," returned Defarge, standing before her with his head a little bent, and his hands clasped at his back, like a docile and attentive pupil before his catechist, "I do not question all this. But it has lasted a long time, and it is possible—you know well, my wife, it is possible—that it may not come during our lives."

"Eh, well! How then?" demanded madame, tying another knot, as if there were another enemy strangled.

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"Well!" said Defarge, with a half-complaining and half-apologetic shrug. "We shall not see the triumph."

"We shall have helped it," returned madame, with her extended hand in strong action. "Nothing that we do is done in vain. I believe, with all my soul, that we shall see the triumph. But even if not, even if I knew certainly not, show me the neck of an aristocrat and tyrant, and still I would——"

There madame, with her teeth set, tied a very terrible knot indeed.

"Hold!" cried Defarge, reddening a little, as if he felt charged with cowardice; "I too, my dear, will stop at nothing."

"Yes! But it is your weakness that you sometimes need to see your victim and your opportunity to sustain you. Sustain yourself without that. When the time comes, let loose a tiger and a devil; but wait for the time with the tiger and the devil changed—not shown—yet always ready."

She should have known of what she was talking; for she was as menacing as lightning, as devastating as an earthquake, as cruel as a tiger and as wicked as the worse devil that could be imagined.

ENTERING A NAME ON THE "REGISTER."

The Defarge wine shop being the storm centre of Saint Antoine, it is natural that those in the know should have some secret understanding with the proprietor as to when danger is walking abroad. This signal of danger is a rose in madame's head-dress, and it is prominent the first time that Barsad the spy enters the shop. Little does that versatile traitor know that the stern, composed woman, knitting so quietly, is the very embodiment of the Terror, and that as she is talking to him she is knitting his name on her terrible register!

See madame seated at her customary place behind the

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little counter, with a rose in front of her, knitting assiduously !

A figure entering at the door threw a shadow on Madame Defarge which she felt to be a new one. She laid down her knitting, and began to pin her rose in her head-dress, before he looked at the figure.

It was curious. The moment Madame Defarge took up the rose, the customers ceased talking, and began gradually to drop out of the wine-shop.

"Good-day, madame," said the new-comer.

"Good-day, monsieur."

She said it aloud, but added to herself, as she resumed her knitting, "Hah ! Good-day, age about forty, height about five feet nine, black hair, generally rather handsome visage, complexion dark, eyes dark, thin, long, and sallow face, aquiline nose but not straight, having a peculiar inclination towards the left cheek which imparts a sinister expression ! Good-day, one and all !"

After taking a little cognac, the spy says :

"You knit with great skill, madame."

"I am accustomed to it."

"A pretty pattern too !"

"*You* think so ?" said madame, looking at him with a smile.

"Decidedly. May one ask what it is for ?"

"Pastime," said madame, still looking at him with a smile, while her fingers moved nimbly.

It was remarkable ; but, the taste of Saint Antoine seemed to be decidedly opposed to a rose on the head-dress of Madame Defarge. Two men had entered separately, and had been about to order drink, when, catching sight of that novelty, they faltered, made a pretence of looking about as if for some friend who was not there, and went away. Nor, of those who had been there when this visitor entered, was there one left. They

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had all dropped off. The spy had kept his eyes open, but had been able to detect no sign. They had lounged away in a poverty-stricken, purposeless, accidental manner, quite natural and unimpeachable.

"JOHN," thought madame, checking off her work as her fingers knitted, and her eyes looked at the stranger. "Stay long enough, and I shall knit 'BARSAD' before you go."

"You have a husband, madame?"

"I have."

"Children?"

"No children."

"Business seems bad?"

"Business is very bad; the people are so poor."

"Ah, the unfortunate, miserable people! So oppressed too—as you say."

"As *you* say," madame retorted, correcting him, and deftly knitting an extra something into his name that boded him no good.

"Pardon me; certainly it was I who said so, but you naturally think so. Of course."

After some further conversation, carried on by the spy on the "pumping" system, in which he fails lamentably to obtain the slightest information, Defarge enters, whom Barsad endeavours to entrap by addressing as "Jacques." Again he is signally routed as Defarge informs him that his name is Ernest.

It is then that the spy plays his trump card, informing the pair that the daughter of their old friend Dr Manette is to marry Charles Darnay, nephew of the murdered Marquis de St. Evrémonde.

Madame Defarge knitted steadily, but the intelligence had a palpable effect upon her husband. Do what he would, behind the little counter, as to the striking of a light and the lighting of his pipe, he was troubled, and his hand was not trustworthy. The spy would have been

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no spy if he had failed to see it, or to record it in his mind.

"A GREAT, STRONG, FRIGHTFULLY GRAND WOMAN."

"Can it be true," said Defarge, in a low voice, looking down at his wife as he stood smoking with his hand on the back of her chair, "what he has said of Ma'amselle Manette?"

"As he has said it," returned madame, lifting her eyebrows a little, "it is probably false. But it may be true."

"If it is——" Defarge began; and stopped.

"If it is?" repeated his wife.

"And if it does come, while we live to see it triumph—I hope, for her sake, Destiny will keep her husband out of France."

"Her husband's destiny," said Madame Defarge, with her usual composure, "will take him where he is to go, and will lead him to the end that is to end him. That is all I know."

"But it is very strange—now, at least, is it not very strange"—said Defarge, rather pleading with his wife to induce her to admit it, "that, after all our sympathy for monsieur her father and herself, her husband's name should be proscribed under your hand at this moment, by the side of that infernal dog's who has just left us?"

"Stranger things than that will happen when it does come," answered madame. "I have them both here, of a certainty; and they are both here for their merits; that is enough."

As Defarge stands at his door that night, smoking and looking at his wife as she moves, still knitting, among the groups of lean, hungry women—also knitting, but not "registers"—he says to himself admiringly:

"A great woman, a strong woman, a grand woman, a frightfully grand woman."

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SAINT ANTOINE RISES.

Lucie has been happily married for some years and dear little footsteps had come into her life. But in her quiet home in Soho she has a fancy that the footsteps she hears outside are echoes of other footsteps afar off, destined to play a great part in her life.

With consummate skill Dickens takes this fancy and in a few words joins the Soho home with Saint Antoine—now raging and furious.

Mr Lorry has come in and said :

“ Now, come and let us sit quiet, and hear the echoes about which you have your theory.”

“ Not a theory; it was a fancy.”

“ A fancy, then, my wise pet,” said Mr Lorry, patting her hand. “ They are very numerous and very loud, though, are they not? Only hear them !”

Just a blank line ! then,

Headlong, mad, and dangerous footsteps to force their way into anybody's life, footsteps not easily made clean again if once stained red, the footsteps raging in Saint Antoine afar off, as the little circle sat in the dark London window.

Saint Antoine had been, that morning, a vast dusky mass of scarecrows heaving to and fro, with frequent gleams of light above the billowy heads, where steel blades and bayonets shone in the sun. A tremendous roar arose from the throat of Saint Antoine, and a forest of naked arms struggled in the air like shrivelled branches of trees in a winter wind : all the fingers convulsively clutching at every weapon or semblance of a weapon that was thrown up from the depths below, no matter how far off.

As a whirlpool of boiling waters has a centre point, so all this raging circled round Defarge's wine-shop, and

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every human drop in the cauldron had a tendency to be sucked towards the vortex where Defarge himself, already begrimed with gunpowder and sweat, issued orders, issued arms, thrust this man back, dragged this man forward, disarmed one to arm another, laboured and strove in the thickest of the uproar.

"Keep near to me, Jacques Three," cried Defarge; "and do you, Jacques One and Two, separate and put yourselves at the head of as many of these patriots as you can. Where is my wife?"

"Eh well! Here you see me!" said madame, composed as ever, but not knitting to-day. Madame's resolute right hand was occupied with an axe, in place of the usual softer implements, and in her girdle were a pistol and a cruel knife.

"Where do you go, my wife?"

"I go," said madame, "with you, at present. You shall see me at the head of women by-and-by."

"Come, then!" cried Defarge in a resounding voice. "Patriots and friends, we are ready! The Bastille!"

"To me, women!" cried Madame Defarge. "What! We can kill as well as the men when the place is taken!" And to her, with a shrill, thirsty cry, trooping women variously armed, but all armed alike in hunger and revenge.

And the apparently impregnable Bastille—the vast fortress prison which was the microcosm of all that was bad and vicious in the Government of France—the embodiment of the abuse of royal power, oppression, tyranny and cruelty—surrenders in six hours; described by Dickens in six short paragraphs—paragraphs of such power, presenting such a picture of mad fury and of raging hatred as he himself has seldom equalled and never surpassed.

Taken, Defarge hastens to "One Hundred and Five North Tower" and secures the manuscript written by Dr Manette during his long imprisonment. He then returns to its courtyard to find the raging flood of maddened men

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and women surging and tossing round the Governor of the Bastile.

FIRST BLOOD TO SAINT ANTOINE.

The governor has surrendered under a flag of truce, but what are such trivialities to such a mob athirst for the only fruits of victory that appeals to them—blood?

In the howling universe of passion and contention that seemed to encompass this grim old officer conspicuous in his grey coat and red decoration, there was but one quite steady figure, and that was a woman's. "See, there is my husband!" she cried, pointing him out. "See Defarge!" She stood immovable close to the grim old officer, and remained immovable close to him; remained immovable close to him through the streets, as Defarge and the rest bore him along; remained immovable close to him when he was got near his destination, and began to be struck at from behind; remained immovable close to him when the long-gathering rain of stabs and blows fell heavy; was so close to him when he dropped dead under it, that, suddenly animated, she put her foot upon his neck, and with her cruel knife—long ready—hewed off his head.

LUCIE! BEWARE THE FOOTSTEPS.

Seven bewildered prisoners have been released and are carried high by the triumphant mob, and seven other men had been murdered and their gory heads carried higher on pikes. These, and the keys of the accursed fortress,

. . . the loudly-echoing footsteps of Saint Antoine escort through the Paris streets in mid-July, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine. Now, Heaven defeat the fancy of Lucie Darnay, and keep these feet far out of her life! For they are headlong, mad, and

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dangerous; and in the years so long after the breaking of the cask at Defarge's wine-shop door, they are not easily purified when once stained red.

Next day it is the turn of Foulon, who had told the famished people that they might eat grass. Defarge learns that he is a prisoner at the Hotel de Ville. Thither flock Saint Antoinnes, the Defarges being in the van. It is Defarge who springs across the barrier and folds the wicked old man in a deadly embrace; it is his wife who follows and turns her hand in one of the ropes with which he is tied and holds him thus while he is dragged into the street to where a street lamp swings; it is there that

Madame Defarge let him go—as a cat might have done to a mouse—and silently and composedly looked at him while they made ready, and while he besought her: the women passionately screeching at him all the time, and the men sternly calling out to have him killed with grass in his mouth. Once, he went aloft, and the rope broke, and they caught him, shrieking; twice, he went loft, and the rope broke, and they caught him, shrieking; then, the rope was merciful and held him, and his head was soon upon a pike, with grass enough in the mouth for all Saint Antoine to dance at the sight of.

THE LAMB APPEALS TO THE TIGRESS.

The footsteps have at last come into Lucie's life. Her husband has received a letter addressed to him at Tellson's Bank—the rendezvous of the French emigrants—from Gabelle, the tax-collector for the Evrémonde estates, saying that he is a prisoner in Paris and that without Darnay's intervention he will assuredly die. Leaving a letter for his wife, Darnay departs for Paris, is arrested as an emigrant and imprisoned "in secret" in La Force through the agency of Defarge.

Jarvis Lorry has preceded him by a few hours to guard

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the interest of Tellson's at the Paris branch; and it is in the courtyard of this branch that the dreadful grindstone stands, as previously described; that is the night when twelve hundred prisoners were butchered—the high-bred and beautiful women being singled out for revolting cruelty—especially by members of their own sex.

Lorry, who has seen the grindstone at work, has just thanked God that no one near and dear to him is in that dreadful city that night, when the door suddenly opens and in rushes Lucie and her father—come to find Charles Darnay. The cruel loadstone rock has drawn them all into the seething vortex of pitiless bloodshed.

Manette, sure of his influence with the people as a prisoner of the Bastille, goes out to see what can be done. In the meantime, having found a lodging near the bank, for Lucie, her child and the faithful Miss Pross, he returns to the bank, and has not been there long before Defarge calls, bringing a note to say that Charles Darnay is safe. Defarge also has a note from Darnay to Lucie, which he wishes to deliver personally. On going out they find two women waiting; the one knitting, the other the drum-beater for Saint Antoine called "The Vengeance."

They all proceed to Lucie's lodging, Madame Defarge going "that she may be able to recognise the faces and know the persons—for their safety."

The letter merely tells Lucie of her husband's safety. In her gratitude she gives one of the hands that is knitting, a passionate, loving, thankful, womanly kiss; but the hand makes no response, drops cold and heavy and takes to its knitting again.

Enter little Lucie with Miss Pross,

... whose rooted conviction that she was more than a match for any foreigner, was not to be shaken by distress and danger, appeared with folded arms, and observed in English to The Vengeance whom her eyes first encountered, "Well, I am sure, Boldface! I hope *you* are pretty well!" She also bestowed a British

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cough on Madame Defarge; but neither of the two took much heed of her.

"Is that his child?" said Madame Defarge, stopping in her work for the first time, and pointing her knitting-needle at little Lucie as if it were the finger of Fate.

"Yes, madame," answered Mr Lorry; "this is our poor prisoner's darling daughter, and only child."

The shadow attendant on Madame Defarge and her party seemed to fall so threatening and dark on the child, that her mother instinctively kneeled on the ground beside her, and held her to her breast. The shadow attendant on Madame Defarge and her party seemed then to fall, threatening and dark, on both the mother and the child.

"It is enough, my husband," said Madame Defarge. "I have seen them. We may go."

But the suppressed manner had enough of menace in it—not visible and presented, but indistinct and withheld—to alarm Lucie into saying, as she laid her appealing hand on Madame Defarge's dress:

"You will be good to my poor husband. You will do him no harm. You will help me to see him if you can?"

"Your husband is not my business here," returned Madame Defarge, looking down at her with perfect composure. "It is the daughter of your father who is my business here."

"For my sake, then, be merciful to my husband. For my child's sake! She will put her hands together and pray you to be merciful. We are more afraid of you than of these others."

Madame Defarge received it as a compliment, and looked at her husband. Defarge, who had been uneasily biting his thumb-nail and looking at her, collected his face into a sterner expression.

"What is it that your husband says in that little letter?" asked Madame Defarge, with a lowering smile. "Influence; he says something touching influence?"

"That my father," said Lucie, hurriedly taking the paper from her breast, but with her alarmed eyes on her

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questioner and not on it, "has much influence around him."

"Surely it will release him!" said Madame Defarge. "Let it do so."

"As a wife and mother," cried Lucie most earnestly, "I implore you to have pity on me, and not to exercise any power that you possess against my innocent husband, but to use it in his behalf. Oh, sister-woman, think of me! As a wife and mother!"

Madame Defarge looked, coldly as ever, at the suppliant, and said, turning to her friend The Vengeance:

"The wives and mothers we have been used to see, since we were as little as this child, and much less, have not been greatly considered? We have known *their* husbands and father laid in prison and kept from them, often enough? All our lives we have seen our sister-women suffer, in themselves and in their children, poverty, nakedness, hunger, thirst, sickness, misery, oppression and neglect of all kinds?"

"We have seen nothing else," returned The Vengeance.

"We have borne this a long time," said Madame Defarge, turning her eyes again upon Lucie. "Judge you! Is it likely that the trouble of one wife and mother would be much to us now?"

She resumed her knitting and went out. The Vengeance followed. Defarge went last, and closed the door.

THE LIKENESS AGAIN.

The worst has happened. Tried and released, Darnay has been re-arrested on the day of his liberation, re-tried and condemned to death in twenty-four hours—condemned mainly on the evidence of the Manette manuscript. All seems hopeless.

Carton in the meantime has arrived at Paris, where he meets Barsad (recognised by Jerry Cruncher as the "chief mourner" at the mock-funeral of Roger Cly, his fellow spy). Barsad is a prison sheep or spy, and turnkey at the Con-

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ciergerie; and, under the threat of denunciation to the dread Tribunal as an English spy, he agrees to give Carton access to Darnay's cell.

That arranged, Carton thinks it wise that the Defarges shall know that there is a man in Paris resembling Darnay. He makes for that establishment and is keenly regarded by Madame Defarge, who says he is "a good deal like" Darnay. While he is poring over a Jacobin journal, Madame Defarge is talking with her husband, with the Jacques of the gnawed fingers, and with "The Vengeance," as to the extermination of the Darnay family. Her husband is in favour of stopping at the death of Darnay. Then says madame :

"See you then, Jacques," said Madame Defarge wrathfully; "and see you, too, my little Vengeance; see you both! Listen! For other crimes as tyrants and oppressors, I have this race a long time on my register, doomed to destruction and extermination. Ask my husband is that so."

"It is so," assented Defarge, without being asked.

"In the beginning of the great days, when the Bastille falls, he finds this paper of to-day, and he brings it home, and in the middle of the night when this place is clear and shut, we read it, here on this spot, by the light of this lamp. Ask him, is that so."

"It is so," assented Defarge.

"That night, I tell him, when the paper is read through, and the lamp is burned out, and the day is gleaming in above those shutters and between those iron bars, that I have now a secret to communicate. Ask him, is that so."

"It is so," assented Defarge again.

"I communicate to him that secret. I smite this bosom with these two hands as I smite it now, and I tell him, 'Defarge, I was brought up among the fishermen of the seashore, and that peasant family so injured by the two Evrémonde brothers, as that Bastille paper describes, is my family. Defarge, that sister of the mortally wounded boy upon the ground was my sister, that husband was my

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sister's husband, that unborn child was their child, that brother was my brother, that father was my father, those dead are my dead, and that summons to answer for those things descends to me ! ' Ask him, is that so."

"It is so," assented Defarge once more.

"Then tell wind and fire where to stop," returned madame; "but don't tell me."

A CHILD FOR THE GUILLOTINE.

Mistrusting her husband's weakness for Dr Manette, Madame Defarge has a conference with The Vengeance and Jacques of the gnawed fingers at the hut of a wood-sawyer, and madame announces her determination that Darnay's wife and child must follow him to the guillotine.

"She has a fine head for it," croaked Jacques Three. "I have seen blue eyes and golden hair there, and they looked charming when Samson held them up." Ogre that he was, he spoke like an epicure.

Madame Defarge cast down her eyes, and reflected a little.

"The child also," observed Jacques Three, with a meditative enjoyment of his words, "has golden hair and blue eyes. And we seldom have a child there. It is a pretty sight !"

A TIGRESS—WITHOUT PITY.

So it is decided that Lucie, her child and Dr Manette shall be denounced that night—Jacques undertaking to be responsible for the Jury.

That day fifty-two heads are to fall, including the supposed Darnay; for by this time Carton has made his superb sacrifice and is in gaol awaiting the tumbrils—while Lucie, child, husband and father are speeding to the frontier—leaving Miss Pross and Cruncher to follow in a lighter vehicle.

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Madame Defarge takes The Vengeance on one side and says :

" She will now be at home, awaiting the moment of his death. She will be mourning and grieving. She will be in a state of mind to impeach the justice of the Republic. She will be full of sympathy with its enemies. I will go to her."

She goes, bidding The Vengeance keep a place for her at the guillotine. See her, as she walks through the streets of Paris :

There were many women at that time, upon whom the time laid a dreadfully disfiguring hand; but there was not one among them more to be dreaded than this ruthless woman, now taking her way along the streets. Of a strong and fearless character, of shrewd sense and readiness, of great determination, of that kind of beauty which not only seems to impart to its possessor firmness and animosity, but to strike into others an instinctive recognition of those qualities; the troubled time would have heaved her up, under any circumstances. But, imbued from her childhood with a brooding sense of wrong, and an inveterate hatred of a class, opportunity had developed her into a tigress. She was absolutely without pity. If she had ever had the virtue in her, it had quite gone out of her.

In her exaltation at still further glutting her vengeance she is unaware that she is walking to her own death and that the instrument of her punishment is Miss Pross, whom she regards as of less importance than the dirt beneath her feet.

END OF MADAME DEFARGE.

Miss Pross is alone at the apartments of Lucie, having sent Jerry Cruncher to arrange with the posting-house to have a vehicle at the Cathedral. She is full of apprehension

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and is bathing her swollen eyes when "she recoiled and cried out, for she saw a figure standing in the room."

The basin fell to the ground broken, and the water flowed to the feet of Madame Defarge. By strange, stern ways, and through much staining blood, those feet had come to meet that water.

Madame Defarge looked coldly at her, and said, "The wife of Evrémonde; where is she?"

It flashed upon Miss Pross's mind that the doors were all standing open, and would suggest the flight. Her first act was to shut them. There were four in the room, and she shut them all. She then placed herself before the door of the chamber which Lucie had occupied.

Madame Defarge's dark eyes followed her through this rapid movement, and rested on her when it was finished. Miss Pross had nothing beautiful about her; years had not tamed the wildness, or softened the grimness, of her appearance; but she, too, was a determined woman in her different way, and she measured Madame Defarge with her eyes, every inch.

"You might, from your appearance, be the wife of Lucifer," said Miss Pross, in her breathing. "Nevertheless, you shall not get the better of me. I am an English-woman."

Madame Defarge looked at her scornfully, but still with something of Miss Pross's own perception that they two were at bay. She saw a tight, hard, wiry woman before her, as Mr Lorry had seen in the same figure a woman with a strong hand, in the years gone by. She knew full well that Miss Pross was the family's devoted friend; Miss Pross knew full well that Madame Defarge was the family's malevolent enemy.

"On my way yonder," said Madame Defarge, with a slight movement of her hand towards the fatal spot, "where they reserve my chair and my knitting for me, I am come to make my compliments to her in passing. I wish to see her."

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"I know that your intentions are evil," said Miss Pross, "and you may depend upon it, I'll hold my own against them."

Each spoke in her own language; neither understood the other's words; both were very watchful, and intent to deduce from look and manner what the unintelligible words meant.

"It will do her no good to keep herself concealed from me at this moment," said Madame Defarge. "Good patriots will know what that means. Let me see her. Go tell her that I wish to see her. Do you hear?"

"If those eyes of yours were bed-winsches," returned Miss Pross, "and I was an English four-poster, they shouldn't loose a splinter of me. No, you wicked foreign woman; I am your match."

Madame Defarge was not likely to follow these idiomatic remarks in detail; but she so far understood them as to perceive that she was set at naught.

"Woman, imbecile and pig-like!" said Madame Defarge, frowning. "I take no answer from you. I demand to see her. Either tell her that I demand to see her, or stand out of the way of the door, and let me go to her!" This with an angry explanatory wave of her right arm.

"I little thought," said Miss Pross, "that I should ever want to understand your nonsensical language; but I would give all I have, except the clothes I wear, to know whether you suspect the truth, or any part of it."

Neither of them for a single moment released the other's eyes. Madame Defarge had not moved from the spot where she stood when Miss Pross first became aware of her; but, she now advanced one step.

"I am a Briton," said Miss Pross, "I am desperate. I don't care an English Twopence for myself. I know that the longer I keep you here, the greater hope there is for my Ladybird. I'll not leave a handful of that dark hair upon your head, if you lay a finger on me!"

Thus Miss Pross, with a shake of her head and a flash of her eyes between every rapid sentence, and every rapid

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sentence a whole breath. Thus Miss Pross, who had never struck a blow in her life.

But, her courage was of that emotional nature that it brought the irrepressible tears into her eyes. This was a courage that Madame Defarge so little comprehended as to mistake for weakness. "Ha, ha!" she laughed, "you poor wretch! What are you worth? I address myself to that Doctor." Then she raised her voice and called out, "Citizen Doctor! Wife of Evrémonde! Child of Evrémonde! Any person but this miserable fool, answer the Citizeness Defarge!"

Perhaps the following silence, perhaps some latent disclosure in the expression of Miss Pross's face, perhaps a sudden misgiving apart from either suggestion, whispered to Madame Defarge that they were gone. Three of the doors she opened swiftly, and looked in.

"Those rooms are all in disorder, there has been hurried packing, there are odds and ends upon the ground. There is no one in that room behind you! Let me look."

"Never!" said Miss Pross, who understood the request as perfectly as Madame Defarge understood the answer.

"If they are not in that room, they are gone, and can be pursued and brought back," said Madame Defarge to herself.

"As long as you don't know whether they are in that room or not, you are uncertain what to do," said Miss Pross to *herself*; "and you shall not know that, if I can prevent your knowing it; and know that, or not know that, you shall not leave here while I can hold you."

"I have been in the streets from the first, nothing has stopped me, I will tear you to pieces but I will have you from that door," said Madame Defarge.

"We are alone at the top of a high house in a solitary courtyard, we are not likely to be heard, and I pray for bodily strength to keep you here, while every minute you are here is worth a hundred thousand guineas to my darling," said Miss Pross.

Madame Defarge made at the door. Miss Pross, on

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the instinct of the moment, seized her round the waist in both her arms, and held her tight. It was in vain for Madame Defarge to struggle and to strike; Miss Pross, with the vigorous tenacity of love, always so much stronger than hate, clasped her tight, and even lifted her from the floor in the struggle that they had. The two hands of Madame Defarge buffeted and tore at her face; but Miss Pross, with her head down, held her round the waist, and clung to her with more than the hold of a drowning woman.

Soon Madame Defarge's hands ceased to strike, and felt at her encircled waist. "It is under my arm," said Miss Pross, in smothered tones, "you shall not draw it. I am stronger than you, I bless Heaven for it. I'll hold till one or other of us faints or dies!"

Madame Defarge's hands were at her bosom. Miss Pross looked up, saw what it was, struck at it, struck out a flash and a crash, and stood alone—blinded with smoke.

All this was in a second. As the smoke cleared, leaving an awful stillness, it passed out on the air, like the soul of the furious woman whose body lay lifeless on the ground.

Thus, disappointed of her vengeance, just as it seemed to reach its culmination, passed this blood-stained soul to its last account.

VIII

“OUR MISSIS.”

(From *Mugby Junction*, one of the Christmas Stories in
All the Year Round)

EXPLANATION OF CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN THIS SKETCH.

The Beast—The travelling public.

The Boy at Mugby—The narrator of this sketch.

Our Missis—Head of the Refreshment Department at
Mugby Junction.

Miss Piff

Mrs Sniff

Miss Whiff

} Assistants to “Our Missis.”

Mr Sniff—Husband to Mrs Sniff.

“OUR MISSIS.”

Mugby Junction was written in 1866. It is divided into two main portions—“Barbox Brothers” and “The Boy at Mugby,” the latter containing that portion which I have called “Our Missis”—that being the title which the Boy at Mugby gives to the lady in charge of the Refreshment Rooms at Mugby Junction. I cannot call to mind that Dickens ever revealed what station he meant by Mugby. Many people think it must be Rugby—but that is only because of a similarity in names. My own opinion is that it is intended for Swindon; for this reason: Dickens was frequently in the West Country, at Bath and Bristol, and must have used Swindon on many occasions; because until quite recent years, certainly many years after Dickens’s death, in virtue of an undertaking given to the Refreshment Contractor for that station and district, every train of the Great Western Railway using the roads through Swindon had to stop there for ten minutes.

In reply to this it will be said that Dickens was also frequently in Birmingham and must have had to change at Rugby frequently; but there was no compulsory stoppage there, as at Swindon. At any rate I give my reason for what it is worth.

I do not think that now it can be said that “Our Missis” and her assistants very much resemble the Refreshment-room attendants of to-day. True, when there is a rush on, or when some favoured and fascinating gentleman is bewitching them with his conversation, it is a little difficult to engage their attention; but, taken by and large, they are a civil and obliging class. The only people of to-day who in any way resemble the Mugby Junction ladies in their resentment at being called upon to serve the public, and who

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have carried into a fine art the habit of complacently ignoring them, are the ladies in post-offices, but I think that even they are awakening to the fact that civility is cheap and courtesy a possibility.

A DESPERATE FOREIGNER.

The Refreshment Rooms at Mugby Junction must have been pretty bad; as the Boy there thus introduces himself :

“ I am the boy at what is called the Refreshment Room at Mugby Junction, and what’s proudest boast is that it never yet refreshed a mortal being.”

On one occasion a foreigner, having in vain sought to get “ a leetel gloss hoff prarndee,”

. . . was a-proceeding at last to help himself, as seems to be the custom in his own country, when Our Missis, with her hair almost a-coming un-Bandolined with rage, and her eyes omitting sparks, flew at him, cotched the decanter out of his hand, and said, “ Put it down! I won’t allow that!” The foreigner turned pale, stepped back with his arms stretched out in front of him, his hands clasped, and his shoulders riz, and exclaimed : “ Ah! Is it possible, this! That these disdaineous females and this ferocious old woman are placed here by the administration, not only to empoison the voyagers, but to affront them! Great Heaven! How arrives it? The English people. Or is he then a slave? Or idiot?”

A FATEFUL JOURNEY.

Let the Boy now proceed to tell his own story :

I think it was her standing up agin the Foreigner as giv’ Our Missis the idea of going over to France, and droring a comparison betwixt Refreshmenting as followed among the frog-eaters, and Refreshmenting as triumphant

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in the Isle of the Brave and Land of the Free (by which, of course, I mean to say agin, Britannia). Our young ladies, Miss Whiff, Miss Piff, and Mrs Sniff, was unanimous opposed to her going; for, as they says to Our Missis one and all, it is well beknown to the hendes of the herth as no other nation except Britain has a idea of anythink, but above all of business. Why then should you tire yourself to prove what is already proved? Our Missis, however (being a teaser at all pints), stood out grim obstinate, and got a return pass by Southeastern Tidal, to go right through, if such should be her dispositions, to Marseilles.

Sniff is husband to Mrs Sniff, and is a regular insignificant cove. He looks arter the sawdust department in a back room, and is sometimes, when we are very hard put to it, let behind the counter with a corkscrew; but never when it can be helped, his demeanour towards the public being disgusting servile. How Mrs Sniff ever come so far to lower herself as to marry him, I don't know; but I suppose *he* does, and I should think he wished he didn't, for he leads a awful life. Mrs Sniff couldn't be much harder with him if he was public. Similarly, Miss Whiff and Miss Piff, taking the tone of Mrs Sniff, they shoulder Sniff about when he is let in with a corkscrew, and they whisk things out of his hands when in his servility he is a-going to let the public have 'em, and they snap him up when in the crawling baseness of his spirit he is a-going to answer a public question, and they drore more tears into his eyes than ever the mustard does which he all day long lays on to the sawdust. (But it ain't strong.) Once, when Sniff had the repulsiveness to reach across to get the milk-pot to hand over for a baby, I see Our Missis in her rage catch him by both his shoulders, and spin him out into the Bandolining Room.

This Bandolining Room, as the Boy calls it, is really the retiring-room for the Refreshment ladies; in which the Boy makes out they spend the whole of their time between trains,

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"a-bandolining of their 'air," as though anointing themselves for the fray with the "Beast"—the latter being the pleasant title they bestow on the travelling public who dare to demand refreshment.

"Bandoline," I suppose, is never heard of to-day; but I see it is defined in a modern dictionary as "a gummy perfumer substance, used for imparting a gloss to the hair, or for fixing it in any position."

FOREIGN REFRESHMENTING.

Our Missis returned. It got circulated among the young ladies, and it as it might be penetrated to me through the crevices of the Bandolining Room, that she had Orrors to reveal, if revelations so contemptible could be dignified with the name. Agitation become awakened. Excitement was up in the stirrups. Expectation stood a-tiptoe. At length it was put forth that on our slackest evening in the week, and at our slackest time of that evening betwixt trains, Our Missis would give her views of foreign Refreshmenting, in the Bandolining Room.

It was arranged tasteful for the purpose. The Bandolining table and glass was hid in a corner, a arm-chair was elevated on a packing-case for Our Missis's ockypation, a table and a tumbler of water (no sherry in it, thankee) was placed beside it. Two of the pupils, the season being autumn, and hollyhocks and dahlias being in, ornamented the wall with three devices in those flowers. On one might be read, "MAY ALBION NEVER LEARN"; on another, "KEEP THE PUBLIC DOWN"; on another, "OUR REFRESHMENTING CHARTER." The whole had a beautiful appearance, with which the beauty of the sentiments corresponded.

On Our Missis's brow was wrote Severity, as she ascended the fatal platform. (Not that that was anythink new.) Miss Whiff and Miss Piff sat at her feet. Three chairs from the Waiting Room might have been perceived by a average eye, in front of her, on which the pupils was

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accommodated. Behind them a very close observer might have discerned a Boy. Myself.

"Where," said Our Missis, glancing gloomily around, "is Sniff?"

"I thought it better," answered Mrs Sniff, "that he should not be let to come in. He is such an Ass."

"No doubt," assented Our Missis. "But for that reason is it not desirable to improve his mind?"

"Oh, nothing will ever improve *him*," said Mrs Sniff.

"However," pursued Our Missis, "call him in, Ezekiel."

I called him in. The appearance of the low-minded cove was hailed with disapprobation from all sides, on account of his having brought his corkscrew with him. He pleaded "the force of habit."

"The force!" said Mrs Sniff. "Don't let us have you talking about force, for Gracious' sake. There! Do stand still where you are, with your back against the wall."

He is a smiling piece of vacancy, and he smiled in the mean way in which he will even smile at the public if he gets a chance (language can say no meaner of him), and he stood upright near the door with the back of his head agin the wall, as if he was a-waiting for somebody to come and measure his heighth for the Army.

REVOLTING DISCLOSURE.

"I should not enter, ladies," says Our Missis, "on the revolting disclosures I am about to make, if it was not in the hope that they will cause you to be yet more implacable in the exercise of the power you wield in a constitutional country, and yet more devoted to the constitutional motto which I see before me"—it was behind her, but the words sounded better so—" 'May Albion never learn!'"

Here the pupils as had made the motto admired it, and cried, "Hear! Hear! Hear!" Sniff, showing an inclination to join in chorus, got himself frowned down by every brow.

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"The baseness of the French," pursued Our Missis, "as displayed in the fawning nature of their Refreshmenting, equals, if not surpasses, anythink as was ever heard of the baseness of the celebrated Bonaparte."

Miss Whiff, Miss Piff, and me, we drored a heavy breath, equal to saying, "We thought as much!" Miss Whiff and Miss Piff seeming to object to my droding mine along with theirs, I drored another to aggravate 'em.

"Shall I be believed," says Our Missis, with flashing eyes, "when I tell you that no sooner had I set my foot upon that treacherous shore——"

Here Sniff, either bursting out mad, or thinking aloud, says, in a low voice: "Feet. Plural, you know."

The cowering that come upon him when he was spurned by all eyes, added to his being beneath contempt, was sufficient punishment for a cove so grovelling. In the midst of a silence rendered more impressive by the turned-up female noses with which it was pervaded, Our Missis went on:

"Shall I be believed when I tell you, that no sooner had I landed," this word with a killing look at Sniff, "on that treacherous shore, than I was ushered into a Refreshment Room where there were—I do not exaggerate—actually eatable things to eat?"

A groan brust from the ladies. I not only did myself the honour of jining, but also of lengthening it out.

"Where there were," Our Missis added, "not only eatable things to eat, but also drinkable things to drink?"

A murmur, swelling almost into a scream, ariz. Miss Piff, trembling with indignation, called out, "Name?"

"I *will* name," said Our Missis. "There was roast fowls, hot and cold; there was smoking roast veal surrounded with browned potatoes; there was hot soup with (again I ask shall I be credited?) nothing bitter in it, and no flour to choke off the consumer; there was a variety of cold dishes set off with jelly; there was salad; there was—mark me! *fresh* pastry, and that of a light construction; there was a luscious show of fruit; there was

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bottles and decanters of sound small wine, of every size, and adapted to every pocket; the same odious statement will apply to brandy; and these were set out upon the counter so that all could help themselves."

ENSLAVED AND IGNORANT.

Our Missis's lips so quivered, that Mrs Sniff, though scarcely less convulsed than she were, got up and held the tumbler to them.

"This," proceeds Our Missis, "was my first unconstitutional experience. Well would it have been if it had been my last and worst. But no. As I proceeded farther into that enslaved and ignorant land, its aspect became more hideous. I need not explain to this assembly the ingredients and formation of the British Refreshment sangwich?"

Universal laughter,—except from Sniff, who, as sangwich-cutter, shook his head in a state of the utmost dejection as he stood with it agin the wall.

"Well!" said Our Missis, with dilated nostrils. "Take a fresh, crisp, long, crusty penny loaf made of the whitest and best flour. Cut it longwise through the middle. Insert a fair and nicely fitting slice of ham. Tie a smart piece of ribbon round the middle of the whole to bind it together. Add at one end a neat wrapper of clean white paper by which to hold it. And the universal French Refreshment sangwich busts on your disgusted vision."

A cry of "Shame!" from all—except Sniff, which rubbed his stomach with a soothing hand.

"I need not," said Our Missis, "explain to this assembly the usual formation and fitting of the British Refreshment Room?"

No, no, and laughter. Sniff agin shaking his head in low spirits agin the wall.

"Well," said Our Missis, "what would you say to a general decoration of everythink, to hangings (sometimes elegant), to easy velvet furniture, to abundance of little

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tables, to abundance of little seats, to brisk bright waiters, to great convenience, to a pervading cleanliness and tastefulness positively addressing the public, and making the Beast thinking itself worth the pains?"

Contemptuous fury on the part of all the ladies. Mrs Sniff looking as if she wanted somebody to hold her, and everybody else looking as if they'd rayther not.

A MALIGNANT MANIAC.

"Three times," said Our Missis, working herself into a truly terrimenjious state,—“three times did I see these shameful things, only between the coast and Paris, and not counting either : at Hazebroucke, at Arras, at Amiens. But worse remains. Tell me, what would you call a person who should propose in England that there should be kept, say at our own model Mugby Junction, pretty baskets, each holding an assorted cold lunch and dessert for one, each at a certain fixed price, and each within a passenger's power to take away, to empty in the carriage at perfect leisure, and to return at another station fifty or a hundred miles farther on?"

There was disagreement what such a person should be called. Whether revolutionist, atheist, Bright (*I* said him), or Un-English. Miss Piff screeched her shrill opinion last, in the words : “A malignant maniac!"

“I adopt,” says Our Missis, “the brand set upon such a person by the righteous indignation of my friend Miss Piff. A malignant maniac. Know, then, that that malignant maniac has sprung from the congenial soil of France, and that his malignant madness was in unchecked action on this same part of my journey.”

I noticed that Sniff was a-rubbing his hands, and that Mrs Sniff had got her eye upon him. But I did not take more particular notice, owing to the excited state in which the young ladies was, and to feeling myself called upon to keep it up with a howl.

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THE SUMMING-UP.

"On my experience south of Paris," said Our Missis, in a deep tone, "I will not expatiate. Too loathsome were the task! But fancy this. Fancy a guard coming round, with the train at full speed, to inquire how many for dinner. Fancy his telegraphing forward the number of dinners. Fancy every one expected, and the table elegantly laid for the complete party. Fancy a charming dinner, in a charming room, and the head-cook, concerned for the honour of every dish, superintending in his clean white jacket and cap. Fancy the Beast travelling six hundred miles on end, very fast, and with great punctuality, yet being taught to expect all this to be done for it!"

A spirited chorus of "The Beast!"

I noticed that Sniff was agin a'rubbing his stomach with a soothing hand, and that he had drored up one leg. But agin I didn't take particular notice, looking on myself as called upon to stimulate public feeling. It being a lark besides.

"Putting everything together," said Our Missis, "French Refreshmenting comes to this, and oh, it comes to a nice total! First: eatable things to eat, and drinkable things to drink."

A groan from the young ladies, kep' up by me.

"Second: convenience, and even elegance."

Another groan from the young ladies, kep' up by me.

"Third: moderate charges."

This time a groan from me, kep' up by the young ladies.

"Fourth:—and here," says Our Missis, "I claim your angriest sympathy,—attention, common civility, nay, even politeness!"

Me and the young ladies regularly raging mad all together.

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THE SERVILE SNIFF.

"And I cannot in conclusion," says Our Missis, with her spitefullest sneer, "give you a completer pictur of that despicable nation (after what I have related), than assuring you that they wouldn't bear our constitutional ways and noble independence at Mugby Junction, for a single month, and that they would turn us to the right-about and put another system in our places, as soon as look at us; perhaps sooner, for I do not believe they have the good taste to care to look at us twice."

The swelling tumult was arrested in its rise. Sniff, bore away by his servile disposition, had drored up his leg with a higher and a higher relish, and was now discovered to be waving his corkscrew over his head. It was at this moment that Mrs Sniff, who had kep' her eye upon him like the fabled obelisk, descended on her victim. Our Missis followed them both out, and cries was heard in the sawdust department.

You come into the Down Refreshment Room, at the Junction, making believe you don't know me, and I'll pint you out with my right thumb over my shoulder which is Our Missis, and which is Miss Whiff, and which is Miss Piff, and which is Mrs Sniff. But you won't get a chance to see Sniff, because he disappeared that night. Whether he perished, tore to pieces, I cannot say; but his corkscrew alone remains, to bear witness to the servility of his disposition.

NO EXAGGERATION.

That the type of "Our Missis" is altogether extinct, is too much to hope for; but we can believe that where she was once the rule she is now the exception—and very much so. Railway companies have learned that civility and consideration to the travelling public are not only a duty but also a paying policy. The meals which can be obtained on our long-distance journeys and in the Refreshment Rooms

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at the great stations compare favourably with those obtainable in France.

It may be thought, with present impressions on the mind, that Dickens in this sketch has exaggerated the state of things as depicted by the Boy. But from enquiries I have made of people who travelled in those days, plus the recollections of a journey I took to Leeds as a small boy in the early 'seventies, I know in this—as in all other matters—that Dickens's pen truly pictured things as they really were; and if types like "Our Missis" are extinct, or too rare to be noticeable, it is due in a great measure to the efforts which women have made themselves, for their own advancement, enfranchisement, enlightenment and betterment.

IX

MISS WARDLE'S ELOPEMENT.

(From *Pickwick Papers*)

EXPLANATION OF CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN THIS SKETCH.

Allen, Benjamin—Medical student.

Allen, Arabella—His sister; afterwards marries Winkle.

Bardell, Mrs—Pickwick's landlady, and Plaintiff in breach of promise action.

Dodson and Fogg—Lawyer sharks.

Dowler, Mrs and Mr—Coach acquaintances of the Pickwickians.

Grummer—Ipswich Constable.

Jingle, Alfred—Strolling player and adventurer.

Joe (Fat Boy)—Servant to Wardle.

Mary—Servant to Nupkins; afterwards Sam Weller's wife.

Nupkins, George—Mayor of Ipswich.

Perker—Wardle's and Pickwick's solicitor.

Pickwick, Samuel—Retired merchant; president of Pickwick Club.

Pott—Editor Eatanswill Gazette.

Raddle, Mrs—Landlady to Bob Sawyer.

Sawyer, Bob—Medical student.

Slurk—Editor Eatanswill Independent.

Snodgrass, Augustus—Protégé of Pickwick's.

Trundle—Wardle's son-in-law.

Tupman, Tracey—Companion of Pickwick.

Wardle—Owner of Manor Farm, Dingley Dell.

Wardle, Rachael—His sister.

Wardle, Isabella }
Wardle, Emily } Wardle's daughters.

Weller, Tony—Father of Sam Weller.

Weller, Susan—His wife.

Weller, Sam—His son.

Winkle, Nathaniel—Protégé of Pickwick's.

Witherfield, Miss—Heroine of Mr Pickwick's amazing bedroom adventure at the "White Horse," Ipswich.

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Pickwick Papers, as it is generally known—*The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, to give it its original title—was published in monthly parts in the years 1836 and 1837; nine in the former year (April to December) and eleven in the latter year (January to October), the last issue being a double number. Had it been written by a man of mature years and ripened experience, it would still have been the world's wonder novel; but when it is remembered that it was written by a young man in his twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth years, we can only use dear old Dominie Sampson's favourite word—"prodigious." Where, in his short career, this gifted genius could have met such counsel, such solicitors, such lawyer's clerks, such coachmen, such medical students, such landladies, such rascals, such editors, such footmen—such giant marvels as the Wellers, the Fat Boy and Jingle, opens a vast field of conjecture. But whether they were realities, or whether they were figments of his imagination, is of no real importance; we have them whichever they are. And that is all that matters.

If I were asked for a recipe for writing such a book as *Pickwick Papers*, I should give it thus: An early knowledge of sordid poverty; of degrading work for long hours, and little money; of bargainings with second-hand booksellers for the purchase of books for sufficient money wherewith to buy a meal for the family; of stealthy visits to pawn-brokers for a similar object; of the miseries accompanying the levying of distresses for rent, taxes, etc.; of the sordid squalor of debtors' prisons, of precarious hand-to-mouth journalism, of badly conducted private schools, and of second and third-rate attorney's offices. Add super-sensitiveness, an unusual precocity, an all-pervading power

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of observation, a keen sense of humour, an equally keen sense of pathos, a vivid imagination, a sincere belief in and love of humanity, and an unrivalled genius for bending all your powers and gifts to your will, and there is the recipe complete. But is not that Dickens? Certainly! And when he was made, the mould was broken.

Thackeray describes *Vanity Fair* as "a novel without a hero." That may be more or less true; although George Sedley, Rawdon Crawley and Dobbin might each be cast for that character. But of this there is no possibility of doubt: that *Pickwick Papers* is a novel without a heroine. Of its ninety-six speaking characters, thirty are women, of whom Arabella Allen, Mrs Bardell, Mrs Dowler, Mary (servant to Nupkins. Ye gods! a Mary such as this, servant to a Nupkins!), Mrs Pott, Mrs Raddle, Rachael Wardle, Mrs Weller, and Miss Witherfield occupy the most prominent positions—but none of them is a heroine in any sense of the word, though all worthy of exalted mention.

What is the most wonderful thing about this wonder work? I think undoubtedly the hero. Here is a book written by a youth of twenty-four at a time which might be termed the age of youth. Byron had been dead about ten years, but he had filled the imagination with his handsome young men and lovely maidens. Scott had been dead only four years—and all his heroes were handsome and all his heroines lovely. Lytton was just coming into his own; had published *Pelham*, *Eugene Aram* and *The Last Days of Pompeii*, and all his heroes were handsome and his heroines lovely; while Disraeli had written *Vivian Grey*—in which youth and beauty played a prominent part. Added to this, while *Pickwick Papers* was yet running its early course, an historic event occurred which appealed more strongly to the imagination on behalf of youth than any book could possibly do. A young girl of seventeen awakened from her slumbers after midnight to be informed that she was ruler of the mightiest Empire the world had ever known, and holding her first Privy Council in her night attire. Truly the age of youth! And lo! along comes Dickens with his hero—a

stout, more than middle-aged man, bald-headed, moon-faced, bespectacled, in shorts and gaiters—and no heroine. Away go handsome youths and beauteous maidens and Pickwick holds the field supreme. A Wonder Work? Yes! And more! A super-work, dealing with super-people, written by a super-man.

How popular was Pickwick. It was the rage at the Universities and the undergraduates used to set mock-examination papers on it. It had a cigar named after it—a penny cigar; long since—and very properly—dead; killed, like the “Vevy Fin,” by the ubiquitous cigarette; but it lived at least fifty years, for about 1880, during the “la-di-da” craze, this chorus was being sung everywhere :

“He wears a penny flower in his coat, la-di-da,
And a penny paper collar round his throat, la-di-da;
In his hand a penny stick, in his mouth a penny “Pick,”
And a penny in his pocket, la-di-da.”

There is one very pathetic page in *Pickwick Papers*—that is the one on which appears the account of the cricket match between Dingley Dell and Muggleton; pathetic because it displays a lamentable ignorance of the game, and is not even funny; pathetic because it tells us more strongly than words could do that Dickens in his boyhood had found no time for sport. Read his books in which boys play a prominent part and you will find that games are never mentioned—*Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, *Dombey and Son* and *David Copperfield*. The sadness of their joyless boyhood is but the reflection of the sadness of his own.

It is customary to talk and write about Pickwick, Tupman, Snodgrass and Winkle as the four inseparables. But this is not really so. A careful perusal of the book will show that, after the first few chapters, it is Pickwick and Winkle who are always in the limelight, Snodgrass and Tupman very rarely.

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RACHAEL'S FIRST VICTIM.

Miss Rachael Wardle is jolly old Wardle's sister—Wardle of Dingley Dell. A spinster lady of uncertain age—which really means a very certain age—she is one of that vast army of unmarried women who—certainly up to the age of sixty—if they ever confess to reaching such an age—never abandon hope of entering into the holy estate of matrimony. To such as these the attentions of all unmarried men are welcome—and, alas! that it should be so, it is among this class of women that the needy adventurer with a plausible manner, finds his readiest victims. Of such is Miss Rachael Wardle; for she throws over the amorous but timorous Tupman, of solid worth and fortune, for the needy, greedy adventurer Jingle—who, for so much money, in turn throws her over, with as little compunction as he would throw away the stump of a cigar.

Rachael Wardle is not a great character in *Pickwick Papers*, but as she is the means whereby the perfidy of Alfred Jingle is exposed, and is indirectly the means by which Sam Weller is brought on the scene, I have deemed her love affairs to be of sufficient importance to find a place in these pages.

Let us glance at the first victim of her mature charms, Mr Tracy Tupman, as he sits by his leader's side at a meeting of the Pickwick Club, with which the book opens.

On his (Mr Pickwick's) right hand sat Mr Tracy Tupman—the too susceptible Tupman, who to the wisdom and experience of maturer years superadded the enthusiasm and ardour of a boy, in the most interesting and pardonable of human weaknesses—love. Time and feeding had expanded that once romantic form; the black silk waistcoat had become more and more developed; inch by inch had the gold watch-chain beneath it disappeared from within the range of Tupman's vision; and gradually had the capacious chin encroached upon the borders of the white cravat: but the soul of Tupman had known no

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change—admiration of the fair sex was still its ruling passion.

The "four" have journeyed to Rochester by coach, and have scraped up an acquaintance with Alfred Jingle, whose appearance is thus graphically described :

He was about the middle height, but the thinness of his body, and the length of his legs, gave him the appearance of being much taller. The green coat had been a smart dress garment in the days of swallow-tails, but had evidently in those times adorned a much shorter man than the stranger, for the soiled and faded sleeves scarcely reached to his wrists. It was buttoned closely up to his chin, at the immense hazard of splitting the back; and an old stock, without a vestige of shirt-collar, ornamented his neck. His scanty black trousers displayed here and there those shiny patches which bespeak long service, and were strapped very tightly over a pair of patched and mended shoes, as if to conceal the dirty white stockings, which were nevertheless distinctly visible. His long black hair escaped in negligent waves from beneath each side of his old pinched up hat; and glimpses of his bare wrists might be observed between the tops of his gloves, and the cuffs of his coat sleeves. His face was thin and haggard; but an indescribable air of jaunty impudence and perfect self-possession pervaded the whole man.

There we have word pictures of the two aspirants for the hand of Rachael. Worth and respectability on the one side, seedy vagabondage on the other. Which will win?

Personally I should like to hate Jingle; but I once saw Henry Irving play the part, since when I have come perilously near to loving him—Iring made him such a delightful rascal.

The day after their arrival at Rochester, the four go to see a grand review, and in a very little time they lose Tupman, but subsequently find him in very comfortable circumstances.

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In an open barouche, the horses of which had been taken out, the better to accommodate it to the crowded place, stood a stout old gentleman, in a blue coat and bright buttons, corduroy breeches, and top boots, two young ladies in scarfs and feathers, a young gentleman apparently enamoured of one of the young ladies in scarfs and feathers, a lady of doubtful age, probably the aunt of the aforesaid, and Mr Tupman, as easy and unconcerned as if he had belonged to the family from the first moments of his infancy. Fastened up behind the barouche was a hamper of spacious dimensions—one of those hampers which always awaken in a contemplative mind associations connected with cold fowls, tongues, and bottles of wine—and on the box sat a fat and red-faced boy, in a state of somnolency, whom no speculative observer could have regarded for an instant without setting down as the official dispenser of the contents of the before-mentioned hamper, when the proper time for their consumption should arrive.

Thus, in casual manner, are brought on to the stage, two of the great characters—Wardle and the Fat Boy.

There are also in the carriage Wardle's two daughters—Isabella and Emily; and Rachael would scarcely have been human had she not been a little jealous of them.

TRACY TUPMAN MAKES THE RUNNING.

It took but little time for the "blind-boy" to place his darts in these two middle-aged bosoms; but fate had decreed that when Tupman made the acquaintance of Jingle he was meeting him who was destined to smash his idyll into atoms.

On parting, the four accepted a hearty invitation to spend a few days at Dingley Dell. Accordingly the next morning they set out—the sporting Mr Winkle riding a horse, and the others in a "curious little box on four wheels, with a low place like a wine-bin for two behind and an elevated perch for one in front," drawn by an immense brown horse

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displaying great symmetry of bone, and so quiet that a "hinfant in arms might drive him," and he wouldn't shy "if he was to meet a vagin-load of monkeys with their tales burnt off." Mr Pickwick is the driver.

Of course, Mr Pickwick drops his whip; of course, Mr Winkle gets off his horse to pick it up; of course, the horse slips the reins over his head and holds Mr Winkle off at their full length; of course Mr Pickwick in the goodness of his heart dismounts from the chaise (throwing the reins on the horse's back) and, whip in hand, advances to the aid of his distressed follower. Of course the horse, seeing him thus advancing, retires backwards dragging Winkle with him, till that gentleman's arms being nearly dragged from their sockets, he lets go and the horse quietly trots home to Rochester; of course the other horse in the chaise, feeling the reins on his back, tears off and the chaise, dashing against a wooden bridge, is smashed hopelessly, Tupman and Snodgrass having previously jumped out.

Why of course? Because all these things are in strict accord with the original plan of the book—a series of moving—laughter-moving—accidents by flood and field to four Cockney sportsmen. It is significant of this original conception that the design on the green wrapper in which the monthly parts made their appearance, should have had a purely sporting character, and exhibited Mr Pickwick sleepily fishing in a punt, and Mr Winkle shooting at what looks like a cock-sparrow—the whole surrounded by a chaste arabesque of guns, rods and landing-nets.

It is a very sad and dishevelled four that later in the day make their appearance at Manor Farm; but the trials and troubles of the day are soon forgotten in the warm hospitality they receive at the hands of their hearty host.

WINKLE AIMS AT A ROOK AND SHOOTS A "CROW."

Cupid is determined that Tupman and Rachael shall have every chance. The morning after their arrival Wardle and Winkle go rook-shooting. Winkle has given himself the

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reputation of being a capital shot, so great things are expected of him.

"Now, Mr Winkle," said the host, reloading his own gun. "Fire away."

Mr Winkle advanced, and levelled the gun. Mr Pickwick and his friends cowered involuntarily to escape damage from the heavy fall of rooks, which they felt quite certain would be occasioned by the devastating barrel of their friend. There was a solemn pause—a shout—a flapping of wings—a faint click.

"Hallo!" said the old gentleman.

"Won't it go?" inquired Mr Pickwick.

"Missed fire," said Mr Winkle, who was very pale: probably from disappointment.

"Odd," said the old gentleman, taking the gun. "Never knew one of them miss-fire before. Why, I don't see anything of the cap."

"Bless my soul," said Mr Winkle. "I declare I forgot the cap!"

The slight omission was rectified. Mr Pickwick crouched again. Mr Winkle stepped forward with an air of determination and resolution; and Mr Tupman looked out from behind a tree. The boy shouted; four birds flew out. Mr Winkle fired. There was a scream as of an individual—not a rook—in corporeal anguish. Mr Tupman had saved the lives of innumerable unoffending birds by receiving a portion of the charge in his left arm.

To describe the confusion that ensued would be impossible. To tell how Mr Pickwick in the first transports of his emotion called Mr Winkle "Wretch!" how Mr Tupman lay prostrate on the ground; and how Mr Winkle knelt horror-stricken beside him; how Mr Tupman called distractedly upon some feminine Christian name, and then opened first one eye, and then the other, and then fell back and shut them both;—all this would be as difficult to describe in detail, as it would be to depict the gradual recovering of the unfortunate individual, the binding up

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of his arm with pocket-handkerchiefs, and the conveying him back by slow degrees supported by the arms of his anxious friends.

They drew near the house. The ladies were at the garden-gate, waiting for their arrival and their breakfast. The spinster aunt appeared; she smiled and beckoned them to walk quicker. 'Twas evident she knew not of the disaster. Poor thing! there are times when ignorance is bliss indeed.

They approached nearer.

"Why, what is the matter with the little old gentleman?" said Isabella Wardle. The spinster aunt heeded not the remark; she thought it applied to Mr Pickwick. In her eyes Tracy Tupman was a youth; she viewed his years through a diminishing glass.

"Don't be frightened," called out the old host, fearful of alarming his daughters. The little party had crowded so completely round Mr Tupman, that they could not yet clearly discern the nature of the accident.

"Don't be frightened," said the host.

"What's the matter?" screamed the ladies.

"Mr Tupman has met with a little accident; that's all."

The spinster aunt uttered a piercing scream, burst into an hysteric laugh, and fell back into the arms of her nieces.

"Throw some cold water over her," said the old gentleman.

"No, no," murmured the spinster aunt; "I am better now. Bella, Emily—a surgeon! Is he wounded?—Is he dead?—Is he—ha, ha, ha!" Here the spinster aunt burst into fit number two, of hysteric laughter interspersed with screams.

"Calm yourself," said Mr Tupman, affected almost to tears by this expression of sympathy with his sufferings. "Dear, dear madam, calm yourself."

"It is his voice!" exclaimed the spinster aunt; and strong symptoms of fit number three developed themselves forthwith.

"Do not agitate yourself, I entreat you, dearest

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madam," said Mr Tupman soothingly. "I am very little hurt, I assure you."

"Then you are not dead!" ejaculated the hysterical lady. "Oh, say you are not dead!"

"Don't be a fool, Rachael," interposed Mr Wardle, rather more roughly than was consistent with the poetic nature of the scene. "What the devil's the use of his *saying* he isn't dead?"

"No, no, I am not," said Mr Tupman. "I require no assistance but yours. Let me lean on your arm." He added, in a whisper, "Oh, Miss Rachael!" The agitated female advanced, and offered her arm. They turned into the breakfast parlour. Mr Tracy Tupman gently pressed her hand to his lips, and sank upon the sofa.

"Are you faint?" inquired the anxious Rachael.

"No," said Mr Tupman. "It is nothing. I shall be better presently." He closed his eyes.

"He sleeps," murmured the spinster aunt. (His organs of vision had been closed nearly twenty seconds.) "Dear—dear—Mr Tupman!"

Mr Tupman jumped up—"Oh, say those words again!" he exclaimed.

The lady started. "Surely you did not hear them!" she said bashfully.

"Oh, yes, I did!" replied Mr Tupman; "repeat them. If you would have me recover, repeat them."

"Hush!" said the lady. "My brother."

WARM CRICKET.

That day is devoted to seeing a cricket match between Muggleton and Dingley Dell; but in the circumstances, it is deemed advisable to leave Tupman at home in the care of Rachael. In the cricket-field Pickwick, Winkle and Snodgrass again meet Jingle, who during the progress of the game establishes himself as a critical judge of the game by such observations as "butter-fingers," "muff," "humbug," etc. Being asked if he had played the game he replies:

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"Played it! Think I have—thousands of times—not here—West Indies—exciting thing—hot work—very."

"It must be rather a warm pursuit in such a climate," observed Mr Pickwick.

"Warm!—red hot—scorching—glowing. Played a match once—single wicket—friend the Colonel—Sir Thomas Blazo—who should get the greatest number of runs.—Won the toss—first innings—seven o'clock a.m.—six natives to look out—went in; kept in—heat intense—natives all fainted—taken away—fresh half-dozen ordered—fainted also—Blazo bowling—supported by two natives—couldn't bowl me out—fainted too—cleared away the Colonel—wouldn't give in—faithful attendant—Quanko Samba—last man left—sun so hot, bat in blisters, ball scorched brown—five hundred and seventy runs—rather exhausted—Quanko mustered up last remaining strength—bowled me out—had a bath, and went out to dinner."

"And what became of what's-his-name, sir?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Blazo?"

"No—the other gentleman."

"Quanko Samba?"

"Yes, sir."

"Poor Quanko—never recovered it—bowled on, on my account—bowled off, on his own—died, sir." Here the stranger buried his countenance in a brown jug.

A MIDDLE-AGED ANGEL.

What better situation could be devised for an amorous gentleman of forty and a susceptible spinster of about the same age? A gun-shot wound—slight but sufficient—and an interesting pallor and inability to move without assistance on the one hand, and tender compassion and devoted nursing on the other. The spark of love in such circumstances is soon fanned into a glow.

It was evening. Isabella and Emily had strolled out

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with Mr Trundle; the deaf old lady had fallen asleep in her chair; the snoring of the fat boy, penetrated in a low and monotonous sound from the distant kitchen; the buxom servants were lounging at the side-door, enjoying the pleasantness of the hour, and the delight of a flirtation, on first principles, with certain unwieldy animals attached to the farm; and there sat the interesting pair, uncared for by all, caring for none, and dreaming only of themselves; there they sat, in short, like a pair of carefully-folded kid-gloves—bound up in each other.

"I have forgotten my flowers," said the spinster aunt.

"Water them now," said Mr Tupman in accents of persuasion.

"You will take cold in the evening air," urged the spinster aunt, affectionately.

"No, no," said Mr Tupman, rising; "it will do me good. Let me accompany you."

The lady paused to adjust the sling in which the left arm of the youth was placed, and taking his right arm led him to the garden.

There was a bower at the further end, with honeysuckle, jessamine, and creeping plants—one of those sweet retreats which humane men erect for the accommodation of spiders.

The spinster aunt took up a large watering-pot which lay in one corner, and was about to leave the arbour. Mr Tupman detained her, and drew her to a seat beside him.

"Miss Wardle!" said he.

The spinster aunt trembled, till some pebbles which had accidentally found their way into the large water-pot shook like an infant's rattle.

"Miss Wardle," said Mr Tupman, "you are an angel."

"Mr Tupman!" exclaimed Rachael, blushing as red as the water-pot itself.

"Nay," said the eloquent Pickwickian—"I know it but too well."

"All women are angels, they say," murmured the lady, playfully.

"Then what can you be; or to what, without presump-

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tion, can I compare you?" replied Mr Tupman. "Where was the woman ever seen who resembled you? Where else could I hope to find so rare a combination of excellence and beauty? Where else could I seek to——Oh!" Here Mr Tupman paused, and pressed the hand which clasped the handle of the happy watering-pot.

The lady turned aside her head. "Men are such deceivers," she softly whispered.

"They are, they are," ejaculated Mr Tupman; "but not all men. There lives at least one being who can never change—one being who would be content to devote his whole existence to your happiness—who lives but in your eyes—who breathes but in your smiles—who bears the heavy burden of life itself only for you."

"Could such an individual be found," said the lady——

"But he *can* be found," said the ardent Mr Tupman, interposing. "He *is* found. He is here, Miss Wardle." And ere the lady was beware of his intention, Mr Tupman had sunk upon his knees at her feet.

"Mr Tupman, rise," said Rachael.

"Never!" was the valorous reply. "Oh, Rachael!"—He seized her passive hand, and the water-pot fell to the ground as he pressed it to his lips.—"Oh, Rachael! say you love me."

"Mr Tupman," said the spinster aunt, with averted head, "I can hardly speak the words; but—but—you are not wholly indifferent to me."

Mr Tupman no sooner heard this avowal, than he proceeded to do what his enthusiastic emotions prompted, and what, for aught we know (for we are but little acquainted with such matters), people so circumstanced always do. He jumped up, and, throwing his arm round the neck of the spinster aunt, imprinted upon her lips numerous kisses, which after a due show of struggling and resistance, she received so passively, that there is no telling how many more Mr Tupman might have bestowed, if the lady had not given a very unaffected start, and exclaimed in an affrighted tone:

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"Mr Tupman, we are observed!—we are discovered!"

Yes, the Fat Boy was there—but whether he saw anything, the most expert physiognomist could not say, his face was so expressionless. So they thought he must have been asleep. Was he? Wait and see!

THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

So far the course of Tupman's love had run smoothly, but it was destined to be soon disturbed. In the struggle between Cupid and Fate, Cupid, up to now, had had the best of the exchanges; now it was Fate's turn to take a hand.

The cricket match had been followed by a dinner and it was past one o'clock before Wardle, Pickwick, Snodgrass and Winkle made their appearance—shamefully—or shamelessly—intoxicated; they were accompanied by Jingle, who, although "a bottle and a half ahead of any of his companions," was by far the soberest of the party. He at once made an impression on the plastic mind of the fair Rachael, who decided that he was a nice man and decidedly good-looking. He became at once extremely popular. He was very talkative and the number of his anecdotes was only exceeded by his politeness—which was extreme.

No wonder that Mr Tupman's mind was troubled.

The succeeding half-hour's conversation was not of a nature to calm his perturbed spirit. The new visitor was very talkative, and the number of his anecdotes was only to be exceeded by the extent of his politeness. Mr Tupman felt that as Jingle's popularity increased he (Tupman) retired further into the shade. His laughter was forced—his merriment feigned; and when at last he laid his aching temples between the sheets, he thought, with horrid delight, on the satisfaction it would afford him to have Jingle's head at that moment between the feather bed and the mattress.

The indefatigable stranger rose betimes next morning,

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and, although his companions remained in bed overpowered with the dissipation of the previous night, exerted himself most successively to promote the hilarity of the breakfast-table. So successful were his efforts, that even the deaf old lady insisted on having one or two of his best jokes retailed through the trumpet; and even she condescended to observe to the spinster lady, that "he" (meaning Jingle) "was an impudent young fellow": a sentiment in which all her relations then and there present thoroughly coincided.

Jingle, while walking in the garden, heard the Fat Boy telling old Mrs Wardle (Rachael's mother) of the kissing incident with Tupman. Having made up his mind within five minutes of seeing Rachael to lay siege to her heart, he took immediate advantage of this discovery, and turned his footsteps to the breakfast-parlour, where Rachael sat knitting.

He coughed; she looked up and smiled. Hesitation formed no part of Mr Alfred Jingle's character. He laid his finger on his lips mysteriously, walked in, and closed the door.

"Miss Wardle," said Mr Jingle, with affected earnestness, "forgive intrusion—short acquaintance—no time for ceremony—all discovered."

"Sir!" said the spinster aunt, rather astonished by the unexpected apparition and somewhat doubtful of Mr Jingle's sanity.

"Hush!" said Mr Jingle, in a stage whisper;—"large boy—dumpling face—round eyes—rascal!" Here he shook his head expressively, and the spinster aunt trembled with agitation.

"I presume you allude to Joseph, sir?" said the lady, making an effort to appear composed.

"Yes, ma'am—damn that Joe!—treacherous dog, Joe—told the old lady—old lady furious—wild—raving—arbour

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—Tupman—kissing and hugging—all that sort of thing—eh, ma'am—eh?”

“Mr Jingle,” said the spinster aunt, “if you come here, sir, to insult me——”

“Not at all—by no means,” replied the unabashed Mr Jingle;—“overheard the tale—came to warn you of your danger—tender my services—prevent the hubbub. Never mind—think it an insult—leave the room”—and he turned, as if to carry the threat into execution.

“What *shall* I do!” said the poor spinster, bursting into tears. “My brother will be furious.”

“Of course he will,” said Mr Jingle, pausing—“outrageous.”

“Oh, Mr Jingle, what *can* I say!” exclaimed the spinster aunt, in another flood of despair.

“Say he dreamt it,” replied Mr Jingle coolly.

A ray of comfort darted across the mind of the spinster aunt at this suggestion. Mr Jingle perceived it, and followed up his advantage.

“Pooh, pooh!—nothing more easy—blackguard boy—lovely woman—fat boy horsewhipped—you believed—end of the matter—all comfortable.”

Whether the probability of escaping from the consequences of this ill-timed discovery was delightful to the spinster’s feelings, or whether the hearing herself described as a “lovely woman” softened the asperity of her grief, we know not. She blushed slightly, and cast a grateful look on Mr Jingle.

That insinuating gentleman sighed deeply, fixed his eyes on the spinster aunt’s face for a couple of minutes, stared melodramatically, and suddenly withdrew them.

“You seem unhappy, Mr Jingle,” said the lady, in a plaintive voice. “May I show my gratitude for your kind interference, by inquiring into the cause, with a view, if possible, to its removal?”

“Ha!” exclaimed Mr Jingle, with another start—“removal! remove *my* unhappiness, and your love bestowed upon a man who is insensible to the blessing—who

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even now contemplates a design upon the affections of the niece of the creature who—but no; he is my friend; I will not expose his vices. Miss Wardle—farewell!” At the conclusion of this address, the most consecutive he was ever known to utter, Mr Jingle applied to his eyes the remnant of a handkerchief before noticed, and turned towards the door.

“Stay, Mr Jingle!” said the spinster aunt emphatically. “You have made an allusion to Mr Tupman—explain it.”

“Never!” exclaimed Jingle, with a professional (*i.e.* theatrical) air. “Never!” and, by way of showing that he had no desire to be questioned further, he drew a chair close to that of the spinster aunt and sat down.

“Mr Jingle,” said the aunt, “I entreat—I implore you, if there is any dreadful mystery connected with Mr Tupman, reveal it.”

“Can I,” said Mr Jingle, fixing his eyes on the aunt’s face—“Can I see—lovely creature—sacrificed at the shrine—heartless avarice!” He appeared to be struggling with various conflicting emotions for a few seconds, and then said in a low, deep voice:

“Tupman only wants your money.”

“The wretch!” exclaimed the spinster with energetic indignation. (Mr Jingle’s doubts were resolved. She *had* money.)

“More than that,” said Jingle—“loves another.”

“Another!” ejaculated the spinster. “Who?”

“Short girl—black eyes—niece Emily.”

There was a pause.

Now, if there were one individual in the whole world, of whom the spinster aunt entertained a mortal and deeply-rooted jealousy, it was this identical niece. The colour rushed over her face and neck, and she tossed her head in silence with an air of ineffable contempt. At last, biting her thin lips, and bridling up, she said:

“It can’t be. I won’t believe it.”

“Watch ’em,” said Jingle.

“I will,” said the aunt.

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"Watch his looks."

"I will."

"His whispers."

"I will."

"He'll sit next her at table."

"Let him."

"He'll flatter her."

"Let him."

"He'll pay her every possible attention."

"Let him."

"And he'll cut you."

"Cut *me!*" screamed the spinster aunt. "*He cut me;*—will he!" and she trembled with rage and disappointment.

"You will convince yourself?" said Jingle.

"I will."

"You'll show your spirit?"

"I will."

"You'll not have him afterwards?"

"Never."

"You'll take somebody else?"

"Yes."

"You shall."

Mr Jingle fell on his knees, remained thereupon for five minutes thereafter: and rose the accepted lover of the spinster aunt: conditionally upon Mr Tupman's perjury being made clear and manifest.

VILLAINY TRIUMPHANT.

To such an accomplished and versatile rascal as Jingle the task of furnishing such evidence is easy. He has but to tell the confiding Tupman that Rachael wishes him to avoid her brother's suspicions, and to prove the Fat Boy to have dreamt the kissing incident, by making love to Emily, of whom Rachael is already quite jealous enough.

So Rachael sees the man whom she had accepted but the day before unblushingly flirting with her niece. She is con-

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vinced of his perfidy and Wardle is convinced that the Fat Boy has been dreaming. Jingle impresses upon Tupman that for three days at least there must not be a look, or a wink, or a syllable or a whisper between him and Rachael, and the fatuous and egregiously deceived man not only agrees, but lends his deceiver ten pounds in token of his gratitude.

GONE CLEAN OFF.

Poor Mr Tupman! Little does he guess the purpose to which his loan is to be put.

On the fourth evening after the above recorded events, they are seated at supper, wondering at the absence of Rachael and Jingle when one of the farm hands rushes in with the information that he has seen "Mus'r Jingle and Miss Rachael going off in a po'-chay from the Blue Lion, Muggleton."

"I paid his expenses!" said Mr Tupman, jumping up frantically. "He's got ten pounds of mine!—stop him—he's swindled me!—I won't bear it!—I'll have justice, Pickwick!—I won't stand it!" and with sundry incoherent exclamations of the like nature, the unhappy gentleman spun round and round the apartment, in a transport of frenzy.

"Lord preserve us!" ejaculated Mr Pickwick, eyeing the extraordinary gestures of his friend with terrified surprise. "He's gone mad! What shall we do?"

Wardle and Pickwick set off in pursuit, and have come within a hundred yards of the fugitives when their chaise breaks down and they are thrown violently out. This is the scene:

Old Mr Wardle without a hat, and his clothes torn in several places, stood by his side, and the fragments of the chaise lay scattered at their feet. The post-boys, who had succeeded in cutting the traces, were standing, dis-

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figured with mud and disordered by hard riding, by the horses' heads. About a hundred yards in advance was the other chaise, which had pulled up on hearing the crash. The postilions, each with a broad grin convulsing his countenance, were viewing the adverse party from their saddles, and Mr Jingle was contemplating the wreck from the coach window, with evident satisfaction. The day was just breaking, and the whole scene was rendered perfectly visible by the grey light of the morning.

"Hallo!" shouted the shameless Jingle, "anybody damaged?—elderly gentlemen—no light-weights—dangerous work—very."

"You're a rascal!" roared Wardle.

"Ha! ha!" replied Jingle; and then he added, with a knowing wink, and a jerk of the thumb towards the interior of the chaise—"I say—she's very well—desires her compliments—begs you won't trouble yourself—love to *Tuppy*—won't you get up behind?—drive on, boys."

It is six miles to the next stage and thither the two stout-hearted, elderly gentlemen walk in a deluge of rain.

ENTER SAM.

Jingle and his bride-to-be have arrived safely at the "White Hart" Inn, Borough, and it is at that historic spot that we get our first glimpse of Sam Weller. He is busily engaged

. . . in brushing the dirt off a pair of boots, early on the morning succeeding the events narrated in the last chapter. He was habited in a coarse-striped waistcoat, with black calico sleeves, and blue glass buttons; drab breeches and leggings. A bright red handkerchief was wound in a very loose and unstudied style round his neck, and an old white hat was carelessly thrown on one side of his head. There were two rows of boots before him, one cleaned and the other dirty, and

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at every addition he made to the clean row, he paused from his work, and contemplated its results with evident satisfaction.

Among the boots he has cleaned are those belonging to the runaway couple, which he is told to take up to them. This he does, and the following dialogue occurs between him and Jingle :

"Do you know—what's a-name—Doctors' Commons?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is it?"

"Paul's Church-yard, sir; low archway on the carriage-side, bookseller's at one corner, hot-el on the other, and two porters in the middle as touts for licences."

"Touts for licences!" said the gentleman.

"Touts for licences," replied Sam. "Two coves in white aprons—touches their hats wen you walk in—'Licence, sir, licence?' Queer sort, them, and their mas'rs too, sir—Old Bailey Proctors—and no mistake."

"What do they do?" inquired the gentleman.

"Do! *You*, sir! That an't the wost on it, neither. They puts things into old gen'lm'n's heads as they never dreamed of. My father, sir, was a coachman. A widower he was, and fat enough for anything—uncommon fat, to be sure. His missus dies, and leaves him four hundred pound. Down he goes to the Commons, to see the lawyer and draw the blunt—very smart—top boots on—nosegay in his button-hole—broad-brimmed tile—green shawl—quite the gen'lm'n. Goes through the archway, thinking how he should inwest the money—up comes the touter, touches his hat—'Licence, sir, licence?'—'What's that?' says my father.—'Licence, sir,' says he.—'What licence?' says my father.—'Marriage licence,' says the touter.—'Dash my veskit,' says my father, 'I never thought o' that.'—'I think you want one, sir,' says the touter. My father pulls up, and thinks abit.—'No,' says he, 'damme, I'm too old, b'sides, I'm a many sizes too large,' says he.—

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'Not a bit on it, sir,' says the touter.—'Think not?' says my father.—'I'm sure not,' says he; 'we married a gen'lm'n twice your size, last Monday.'—'Did you, though,' said my father.—'To be sure, we did,' says the touter, 'you're a babby to him—this way, sir—this way!'—and sure enough my father walks arter him, like a tame monkey behind a horgan, into a little back office, vere a feller sat among dirty papers and tin boxes, making believe he was busy. 'Pray take a seat, vile I makes out the affidavit, sir,' says the lawyer.—'Thankee, sir,' says my father, and down he sat, and stared with all his eyes, and his mouth vide open, at the names on the boxes. 'What's your name, sir?' says the lawyer.—'Tony Weller,' says my father.—'Parish?' says the lawyer.—'Belle Savage,' says my father; for he stopped there wen he drove up, and he know'd nothing about parishes, *he* didn't.—'And what's the lady's name?' says the lawyer. My father was struck all of a heap. 'Blessed if I know,' says he.—'Not know!' says the lawyer.—'No more nor you do,' says my father, 'can't I put that in arterwards?'—'Impossible!' says the lawyer.—'Wery well,' says my father, after he'd thought a moment, 'put down Mrs Clarke.'—'What Clarke?' says the lawyer, dipping his pen in the ink.—'Susan Clark, Markis o' Granby, Dorking,' says my father; 'she'll have me, if I ask, I des-say—I never said nothing to her, but she'll have me, I know.' The licence was made out, and she *did* have him, and what's more she's got him now; and *I* never had any of the four hundred pound worse luck. Beg your pardon, sir," said Sam, when he had concluded, "but wen I gets on this here grievance I runs on like a new barrow with the wheel greased." Having said which, and having paused for an instant to see whether he was wanted for anything more, Sam left the room.

"Half-past nine—just the time—off at once," said the gentleman, whom we need hardly introduce as Mr Jingle.

"Time—for what?" said the spinster aunt, coquettishly.

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"Licence, dearest of angels—give notice at the church all you mine, to-morrow"—said Mr Jingle, and he squeezed the spinster aunt's hand.

"The licence!" said Rachael, blushing.

"The licence," repeated Mr Jingle—

"In hurry, post-haste for a licence,
In hurry, ding dong I come back."

"How you run on," said Rachael.

"Run on—nothing to the hours, days, weeks, months, years, when we're united—*run on*—they'll fly on—bolt—mizzle—steam-engine—thousand-horse power—nothing to it."

"Can't—can't we be married before to-morrow morning?" inquired Rachael.

"Impossible—can't be—notice at the church—leave the licence to-day—ceremony come off to-morrow."

"I am so terrified, lest my brother should discover us!" said Rachael.

"Discover—nonsense—too much shaken by the breakdown—besides—extreme caution—gave up the post-chaise—walked on—took a hackney coach—came to the Borough—last place in the world that he'd look in—ha! ha!—capital notion that—very."

"Don't be long," said the spinster, affectionately, as Mr Jingle stuck the pinched-up hat on his head.

"Long away from *you*?—Cruel charmer," and Mr Jingle skipped playfully up to the spinster aunt, imprinted a chaste kiss upon her lips, and danced out of the room.

"Dear man!" said the spinster, as the door closed after him.

"Rum old girl," said Mr Jingle, as he walked down the passage.

THE PRICE OF A WOMAN'S HEART.

But Jingle is wrong. Wardle and Pickwick have traced them, and, fortified with the presence of Mr Perker—Wardle's solicitor—make their way to the "White Hart"

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yard, where they find Sam and proceed to question him as to who is in the house.

"Who there is in the house!" said Sam, in whose mind the inmates were always represented by that particular article of their costume which came under his immediate superintendence. "There's a vooden leg in number six; there's a pair of Hessians in thirteen; there's two pair of halves in the commercial; there's these here painted tops in the snugery inside the bar; and five more tops in the coffee-room."

"Nothing more?" said the little man.

"Stop a bit," replied Sam, suddenly recollecting himself. "Yes; there's a pair of Vellingtons a good deal worn, and a pair o' lady's shoes, in number five."

"What sort of shoes?" hastily inquired Wardle, who, together with Mr Pickwick, had been lost in bewilderment at the singular catalogue of visitors.

"Country make," replied Sam.

"Any maker's name?"

"Brown."

"Where of?"

"Muggleton."

"It *is* them," exclaimed Wardle. "By heavens, we've found them."

"Hush!" said Sam. "The Vellingtons has gone to Doctors' Commons."

"No," said the little man.

"Yes, for a licence."

"We're in time," exclaimed Wardle. "Show us the room; not a moment is to be lost."

"Pray, my dear sir—pray," said the little man; "caution, caution." He drew from his pocket a red silk purse, and looked very hard at Sam as he drew out a sovereign.

Sam grinned expressively.

"Show us into the room at once, without announcing us," said the little man, "and it's yours."

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Sam threw the painted tops into a corner, and led the way through a dark passage, and up a wide staircase. He paused at the end of a second passage, and held out his hand.

"Here it is," whispered the attorney, as he deposited the money in the hand of their guide.

The man stepped forward for a few paces, followed by the two friends and their legal adviser. He stopped at a door.

"Is this the room?" murmured the little gentleman.

Sam nodded assent.

Old Wardle opened the door; and the whole three walked into the room just as Mr Jingle, who had that moment returned, had produced the licence to the spinster aunt.

The spinster uttered a loud shriek, and, throwing herself in a chair, covered her face with her hands. Mr Jingle crumpled up the licence, and thrust it into his coat-pocket. The unwelcome visitors advanced into the middle of the room.

"You—you are a nice rascal, aren't you?" exclaimed Wardle, breathless with passion.

"My dear sir, my dear sir," said the little man, laying his hat on the table. "Pray, consider—pray. Defamation of character: action for damages. Calm yourself, my dear sir, pray—"

"How dare you drag my sister from my house?" said the old man.

"Ay—ay—very good," said the little gentleman, "you may ask that. How dare you, sir—eh, sir?"

"Who the devil are you?" inquired Mr Jingle, in so fierce a tone, that the little gentleman involuntarily fell back a step or two.

"Who is he, you scoundrel," interposed Wardle. "He's my lawyer, Mr Perker, of Gray's Inn. Perker, I'll have this fellow prosecuted—indicted—I'll—I'll—I'll ruin him. And you," continued Mr Wardle, turning abruptly round to his sister, "you, Rachael, at a time of life when you

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ought to know better, what do *you* mean by running away with a vagabond, disgracing your family, and making yourself miserable. Get on your bonnet, and come back. Call a hackney-coach there, directly, and bring this lady's bill, d'ye hear—d'ye hear?"

"Cert'nly, sir," replied Sam, who had answered Wardle's violent ringing of the bell with a degree of celerity which must have appeared marvellous to anybody who didn't know that his eye had been applied to the outside of the keyhole during the whole interview.

"Get on your bonnet," repeated Wardle.

"Do nothing of the kind," said Jingle. "Leave the room, sir—no business here—lady's free to act as she pleases—more than one-and-twenty."

"More than one-and-twenty!" ejaculated Wardle, contemptuously. "More than one-and-forty!"

"I an't," said the spinster aunt, her indignation getting the better of her determination to faint.

"You are," replied Wardle, "you're fifty if you're an hour."

Here the spinster aunt uttered a loud shriek, and became senseless.

"A glass of water," said the humane Mr Pickwick, summoning the landlady.

"A *glass* of water!" said the passionate Wardle. "Bring a bucket, and throw it all over her; it'll do her good, and she richly deserves it."

"Ugh, you brute!" ejaculated the kind-hearted landlady. "Poor dear." And with sundry ejaculations of "come now, there's a dear—drink a little of this—it'll do you good—don't give way so—there's a love," etc., etc., the landlady, assisted by a chamber-maid, proceeded to vinegar the forehead, beat the hands, titillate the nose, and unlace the stays of the spinster aunt, and to administer such other restoratives as are usually applied by compassionate females to ladies who are endeavouring to ferment themselves into hysterics.

"Coach is ready, sir," said Sam, appearing at the door.

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"Come along," cried Wardle. "I'll carry her downstairs."

At this proposition, the hysterics came on with redoubled violence.

The landlady was about to enter a very violent protest against this proceeding, and had already given vent to an indignant inquiry whether Mr Wardle considered himself a lord of the creation, when Mr Jingle interposed—

"Boots," said he, "get me an officer."

"Stay, stay," said little Mr Perker. "Consider, sir, consider."

"I'll *not* consider," replied Jingle. "She's her own mistress—see who dares to take her away—unless she wishes it."

"I *won't* be taken away," murmured the spinster aunt. "I *don't* wish it." (Here there was a frightful relapse.)

"DO FOR TUPPY."

Perker at once sees that this is a case for compromise—and the only possible compromise with Jingle is money. So he takes Jingle on one side and offers him £50.

"Won't do—not half enough!" said Mr Jingle, rising.

"Nay, nay, my dear sir," remonstrated the little attorney, seizing him by the button. "Good round sum—a man like you could treble it in no time—great deal to be done with fifty pounds, my dear sir."

"More to be done with a hundred and fifty," replied Mr Jingle coolly.

"Well, my dear sir, we won't waste time in splitting straws," resumed the little man, "say—say—seventy."

"Won't do," said Mr Jingle.

"Don't go away, my dear sir—pray don't hurry," said the little man. "Eighty; come: I'll write you a cheque at once."

"Won't do," said Mr Jingle.

"Well, my dear sir, well," said the little man, still detaining him; "just tell me what *will* do."

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"Expensive affair," said Mr Jingle. "Money out of pocket—posting, nine pounds; license, three—that's twelve—compensation, a hundred—hundred and twelve—breach of honour—and loss of the lady——"

"Yes, my dear sir, yes," said the little man, with a knowing look, "never mind the last two items. That's a hundred and twelve—say a hundred—come."

"And twenty," said Mr Jingle.

"Come, come, I'll write you a cheque," said the little man; and down he sat at the table for that purpose.

"I'll make it payable the day after to-morrow," said the little man, with a look towards Mr Wardle; "and we can get the lady away, meanwhile." Mr Wardle sullenly nodded assent.

"A hundred," said the little man.

"And twenty," said Mr Jingle.

"My dear sir," remonstrated the little man.

"Give it him," interposed Mr Wardle, "and let him go."

The cheque was written by the little gentleman, and pocketed by Mr Jingle.

"Now, leave this house instantly!" said Wardle, starting up.

"My dear sir," urged the little man.

"And mind," said Mr Wardle, "that nothing should have induced me to make this compromise—not even a regard for my family—if I had not known that the moment you got any money in that pocket of yours, you'd go to the devil faster, if possible, than you would without it—"

"My dear sir," urged the little man again.

"Be quiet, Perker," resumed Wardle. "Leave the room, sir."

"Off directly," said the unabashed Jingle. "Bye-bye, Pickwick."

If any dispassionate spectator could have beheld the countenance of the illustrious man, whose name forms the leading feature of the title of this work, during the latter

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part of this conversation, he would have been almost induced to wonder that the indignant fire which flashed from his eyes, did not melt the glasses of his spectacles—so majestic was his wrath. His nostrils dilated, and his fists clenched involuntarily, as he heard himself addressed by the villain. But he restrained himself again—he did *not* pulverise him.

“Here,” continued the hardened traitor, tossing the licence at Mr Pickwick’s feet; “get the name altered—take home the lady—do for Tuppy.”

Mr Pickwick was a philosopher, but philosophers are only men in armour, after all. The shaft had reached him, penetrated through his philosophical harness, to his very heart. In the frenzy of his rage, he hurled the ink-stand madly forward, and followed it up himself. But Mr Jingle had disappeared, and he found himself caught in the arms of Sam.

“Hallo,” said that eccentric functionary, “furniter’s cheap were you come from, sir. Self-acting ink, that ’ere; it’s wrote your mark upon the wall, old gen’lm’n. Hold still, sir : wat’s the use o’ running arter a man as has made his lucky, and got to t’other end of the Borough by this time.”

Mr Pickwick’s mind, like those of all truly great men, was open to conviction. He was a quick, and powerful reasoner; and a moment’s reflection sufficed to remind him of the impotency of his rage. It subsided as quickly as it had been roused. He panted for breath, and looked benignantly round upon his friends.

Shall we tell the lamentations that ensued, when Miss Wardle found herself deserted by the faithless Jingle? Shall we extract Mr Pickwick’s masterly description of that heart-rending scene? His note-book, blotted with the tears of sympathising humanity, lies open before us; one word, and it is in the printer’s hands. But, no! we will be resolute! We will not wring the public bosom, with the delineation of such suffering!

Slowly and sadly did the two friends and the deserted

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lady, return next day in the Muggleton heavy coach. Dimly and darkly had the sombre shadows of a summer's night fallen upon all around, when they again reached Dingley Dell, and stood within the entrance to Manor Farm.

Thus ends Rachael Wardle's one romance. True, she has had her glorious hour: Two proposals in two consecutive days—an exciting elopement—chased and nearly overtaken by her infuriated brother—a marriage licence even obtained. And then the cup dashed from her lips! To-day we are a bit aghast at the somewhat cavalier manner in which the lady is utterly ignored in the negotiations with Jingle; but a century ago women were much more amenable to the authority of their male relatives than in these enlightened times.

Yes, she has had her little hour with its sweet triumphs—the sweeter because they are so strange—and its bitter disappointments. Whether she profits by her experience we do not know, as thenceforth she vanishes from the book. We can at least hope that her heart is not permanently broken; and that, when she recovers from her first rude awakening as to the perfidy of man, she resigns herself to her spinster fate and settles down, one of that splendid sisterhood of single women whose sole object in life is to go about doing all the good that comes to hand.

X

DAVID'S DORA.

(From *David Copperfield*).

EXPLANATION OF CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN THIS SKETCH.

Copperfield, David—Dora's husband.

Crupp, Mrs—David's landlady.

Larkins, Miss—One of David's early "fancies."

Murdstone, Miss—Dora's companion; sister of David's step-father.

Mills, Julia—Dora's confidential friend.

Shepherd, Miss—An earlier "fancy" of David's.

Strong, Mrs—Young wife of David's old schoolmaster at Canterbury.

Spewlow, Dora—David's "child-wife."

Spewlow, Mr—Dora's father, to whom David is articled.

Spewlow, Clarissa and Lavina—Dora's maiden aunts.

Traddles—David's old schoolmaster at Creakle's.

Trotwood, Betsy—David's great-aunt.

Wickfield, Agnes—David's girl companion at Canterbury, and his second wife.

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If Chapter XVIII ("A Retrospect") in *David Copperfield* is autobiographical, it gives a strong impression that early in life Dickens was very susceptible to the fair sex; for it seems that at sixteen he is over head and ears in love with Miss Shepherd.

Miss Shepherd is a boarder at the Misses Nettingalls' establishment. I adore Miss Shepherd. She is a little girl, in a spencer, with a round face and curly flaxen hair. The Misses Nettingalls' young ladies come to the Cathedral too. I cannot look upon my book, for I must look upon Miss Shepherd. When the choristers chaunt, I hear Miss Shepherd. In the service I mentally insert Miss Shepherd's name; I put her in among the Royal Family. At home, in my own room, I am sometimes moved to cry out, "Oh, Miss Shepherd!" in a transport of love.

That dream, after lasting some time, being brought to an untimely end by the young lady "making a face" at him in the streets, at the age of seventeen he worships the eldest Miss Larkins, who is about thirty.

The eldest Miss Larkins knows officers. It is an awful thing to bear. I see them speaking to her in the street. I see them cross the way to meet her, when her bonnet (she has a bright taste in bonnets) is seen coming down the pavement, accompanied by her sister's bonnet. She laughs and talks, and seems to like it. I spend a good deal of my own spare time in walking up and down to meet her. If I can bow to her once in the day (I know

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her to bow to, knowing Mr Larkins), I am happier. I deserve a bow now and then. The raging agonies I suffer on the night of the Race Ball, where I know the eldest Miss Larkins will be dancing with the military, ought to have some compensation, if there be even-handed justice in the world.

Such calf-love is very laughable—but it is also very wonderful, because it is so real and so sincere. The same reality and sincerity of devotion which he gave in these impossible cases, is apparent in his first serious courtship—that of Dora Spenlow. I think his wooing of, and wedding with Dora, almost a sublime mixture of pathos, of humour and of tragedy. Some of the scenes described may be intended as actual reminiscences of personal experiences. Possibly, when he puts into the mouth of Annie Strong—the young wife of the aged Dr Strong—the words: “There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose” (Ch. XLV), Dickens is probably not only alluding to David’s marriage with Dora, but to his own marriage, which was destined to end so unhappily for these very reasons a few years later.

So far as the sometimes comical—always disastrous—state of Dora’s housekeeping is concerned, I am all for Dora, and if David had reflected he would have known that he was getting nothing more, or worse, than was to be expected. The only child of a (supposedly) wealthy and widowed Proctor, Dora was brought up in luxurious surroundings, with servants to do her slightest bidding, without care, without anxiety and without any knowledge of the realities of life—particularly those of housekeeping. The proverbial minimum of wifely knowledge—peeling a potato, or cooking an egg, were Greek to her. That David knew when he courted her, when he married her. Thank goodness this dainty piece of femininity proved untrainable as the perfect housewife. Thank goodness David soon perceived the impossibility of so training her and accepted her as she was, and only could be—a graceful, adorable and

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adoring child-wife, whose love for him had just that tinge of divinity which makes great loves so sacred.

How Dickens must have loved Dora! How generously did he pour the great treasures of his art into her creation! How he *felt* all he wrote of her! Beside the pathetic inconsequence, the utter impracticability of this gossamer-like daintiness, the super (and in her girlhood—almost precocious) wisdom, the serene steadfastness, the angel-like perfections of Agnes stand in bewildering contrast. There is only one flaw in my appreciation of the presentment of Dora. Would so impracticable a girl have been so absurdly practical as to arrange for her husband's second marriage on her death-bed? I would love to answer "Yes"—but the probabilities are all against it.

BEAUTIFUL HOUSE, BEAUTIFUL NAME, BEAUTIFUL GIRL.

David having been articled to the firm of Spenlow & Jorkins, Proctors, of Doctors' Commons, is invited to spend a week-end at Mr Spenlow's house at Norwood.

There was a lovely garden to Mr Spenlow's house; and though that was not the best time of the year for seeing a garden, it was so beautifully kept, that I was quite enchanted. There was a charming lawn, there were clusters of trees, and there were perspective walks that I could just distinguish in the dark, arched over with trellis-work, on which shrubs and flowers grew in the growing season. "Here Miss Spenlow walks by herself," I thought. "Dear me!"

We went into the house, which was cheerfully lighted up, and into a hall where there were all sorts of hats, caps, great-coats, plaids, gloves, whips, and walking-sticks. "Where is Miss Dora?" said Mr Spenlow to the servant. "Dora!" I thought. "What a beautiful name!"

We turned into a room near at hand (I think it was the identical breakfast-room, made memorable by the brown East Indian sherry), and I heard a voice say, "Mr

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Copperfield, my daughter Dora, and my daughter Dora's confidential friend!" It was, no doubt, Mr Spenlow's voice, but I didn't know it, and I didn't care whose it was. All was over in a moment. I had fulfilled my destiny. I was a captive and a slave. I loved Dora Spenlow to distraction!

She was more than human to me. She was a Fairy, a Sylph, I don't know what she was—anything that no one ever saw, and everything that everybody ever wanted. I was swallowed up in an abyss of love in an instant. There was no pausing on the brink; no looking down, or looking back; I was gone, headlong, before I had sense to say a word to her.

"I," observed a well-remembered voice, when I had bowed and murmured something, "have seen Mr Copperfield before."

The speaker was not Dora. No; the confidential friend, Miss Murdstone!

Thus he meets his fate, and at the same moment his early boyhood's relentless persecutor—still destined to exercise her malign influence against his darling wish.

DELIRIOUS INFATUATION.

What a state of mind I was in! I was jealous of everybody. I couldn't bear the idea of anybody knowing Mr Spenlow better than I did. It was torturing to me to hear them talk of occurrences in which I had had no share. When a most amiable person, with a highly polished bald head, asked me across the dinner-table, if that were the first occasion of my seeing the grounds, I could have done anything to him that was savage and revengeful.

I don't remember who was there, except Dora. I have not the least idea what we had for dinner, besides Dora. My impression is, that I dined off Dora entirely, and sent away half-a-dozen plates untouched. I sat next to

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her. I talked to her. She had the most delightful little voice, the gayest little laugh, the pleasantest and most fascinating little ways, that ever led a lost youth into hopeless slavery. She was rather diminutive altogether. So much the more precious, I thought.

All I know of the rest of the evening is, that I heard the empress of my heart sing enchanted ballads in the French language, generally to the effect that, whatever was the matter, we ought always to dance, *Ta ra la, Ta ra la!* accompanying herself on a glorified instrument, resembling a guitar. That I was lost in blissful delirium. That I refused refreshment. That my soul recoiled from punch particularly. That when Miss Murdstone took her into custody and led her away, she smiled and gave me her delicious hand. That I caught a view of myself in a mirror, looking perfectly imbecile and idiotic. That I retired to bed in a most maudlin state of mind, and got up in a crisis of feeble infatuation.

Next morning he meets Dora in the garden with her little dog Jip and sinks deeper and deeper in love.

How many cups of tea I drank, because Dora made it, I don't know. But, I perfectly remember that I sat swilling tea until my whole nervous system, if I had had any in those days, must have gone by the board. By-and-by we went to church. Miss Murdstone was between Dora and me in the pew; but I heard her sing, and the congregation vanished. A sermon was delivered—about Dora, of course—and I am afraid that is all I know of the service.

We had a quiet day. No company, a walk, a family dinner of four, and an evening of looking over books and pictures; Miss Murdstone with a homily before her, and her eye upon us, keeping guard vigilantly. Ah! little did Mr Spenlow imagine, when he sat opposite to me after dinner that day, with his pocket-handkerchief over his

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head, how fervently I was embracing him, in my fancy, as his son-in-law! Little did he think, when I took leave of him at night, that he had just given his full consent to my being engaged to Dora, and that I was invoking blessings on his head!

Golden fancies—golden youth! Yet so human. Who would grudge him one moment of his fervid bliss? or who would not envy his happy misery when his passion declares itself in boots several sizes too small for him?

If the boots I wore at that period could only be produced and compared with the natural size of my feet they would show what the state of my heart was in a most most affecting manner.

MRS CRUPP'S PHILOSOPHY.

Mrs Crupp is David's landlady—supposed to "do" for him. She has another meaning for the verb, and "does" him regularly, persistently and successfully. But she is a lady of some penetration, for, partaking of a little brandy in David's room as a relief to her "spazzums" (in lieu of ticture of cardamus, rhubarb and essence of cloves, which she "would have preferred") she says:

"Come, sir," said Mrs Crupp. "Excuse me. I know what it is, sir. There's a lady in the case."

"Mrs Crupp?" I returned, reddening.

"Oh, bless you! Keep a good heart, sir!" said Mrs Crupp, nodding encouragement. "Never say die, sir! If She don't smile upon you, there's a many as will. You're a young gentleman to *be* smiled on, Mr Copperfull, and you must learn your value, sir."

Mrs Crupp always called me Mr Copperfull: firstly, no doubt, because it was not my name; and secondly, I am inclined to think, in some indistinct association with a washing-day.

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"What makes you suppose there is any young lady in the case, Mrs Crupp?" said I.

"Mr Copperfull," said Mrs Crupp with a great deal of feeling, "I'm a mother myself. You don't eat enough, sir, nor yet drink."

"Is that what you found your supposition on, Mrs Crupp?" said I.

"Sir," said Mrs Crupp, in a tone approaching to severity, "I've laundressed other young gentlemen besides yourself. A young gentleman may be over-careful of himself, or he may be under-careful of himself. He may brush his hair too regular, or too unregular. He may wear his boots much too large for him, or much too small. That is according as the young gentleman has his original character formed. But let him go to which extreme he may, sir, there's a young lady in both of 'em."

Mrs Crupp shook her head in such a determined manner, that I had not an inch of 'vantage-ground left.

"It was but the gentleman which died here before yourself," said Mrs Crupp, "that fell in love—with a barmaid—and had his waistcoats took in directly, though much swelled by drinking."

A PICNIC—JEALOUSY AND JOY.

On Dora's birthday David is invited to a picnic; on which occasion he meets Dora's bosom friend—Miss Julia Mills, a young lady of twenty,

. . . who having suffered from a misplaced affection was understood to have retired from the world in her awful stock of experience, but still to take a calm interest in the unblighted hopes and loves of youth.

'At this picnic David also experiences the first pangs of jealousy.

But all of my own sex—especially one impostor, three or four years my elder, with a red whisker, on which he

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established an amount of presumption not to be endured—were my mortal foes.

We all unpacked our baskets, and employed ourselves in getting dinner ready. Red Whisker pretended he could make a salad (which I don't believe), and obtruded himself on public notice. Some of the young ladies washed the lettuces for him, and sliced them under his directions. Dora was among these. I felt that fate had pitted me against this man, and one of us must fall.

Red Whisker made his salad (I wondered how they could eat it. Nothing should have induced *me* to touch it!) and voted himself into the charge of the wine-cellar, which he constructed, being an ingenious beast, in the hollow trunk of a tree. By-and-bye, I saw him, with the majority of a lobster on his plate, eating his dinner at the feet of Dora!

I have but an indistinct idea of what happened for some time after this baleful object presented itself to my view. I was very merry, I know; but it was hollow merriment. I attached myself to a young creature in pink, with little eyes, and flirted with her desperately. She received my attentions with favour; but whether on my account solely, or because she had any designs on Red Whisker, I can't say. Dora's health was drunk. When I drank it, I affected to interrupt my conversation for that purpose, and to resume it immediately afterwards. I caught Dora's eye as I bowed to her, and I thought it looked appealing. But it looked at me over the head of Red Whisker, and I was adamant.

The young creature in pink had a mother in green; and I rather think the latter separated us from motives of policy. Howbeit, there was a general breaking up of the party, while the remnants of the dinner were being put away; and I strolled off by myself among the trees, in a raging and remorseful state. I was debating whether I should pretend that I was not well, and fly—I don't know where—upon my gallant grey, when Dora and Miss Mills met me.

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"Mr Copperfield," said Miss Mills, "you are dull."

I begged her pardon. Not at all.

"And, Dora," said Miss Mills, "*you* are dull."

Oh dear no! Not in the least.

"Mr Copperfield and Dora," said Miss Mills, with an almost venerable air. "Enough of this. Do not allow a trivial misunderstanding to wither the blossoms of spring, which, once put forth and blighted, cannot be renewed. I speak," said Miss Mills, "from experience of the past—the remote, irrevocable past. The gushing fountains which sparkle in the sun, must not be stopped in mere caprice; the oasis in the desert of Sahara, must not be plucked up idly."

I hardly knew what I did, I was burning all over to that extraordinary extent; but I took Dora's little hand and kissed it—and she let me! I kissed Miss Mills's hand; and we all seemed, to my thinking, to go straight up to the seventh heaven.

ENGAGED! WHAT A HAPPY TIME.

On the way home Julia Mills informs David (Mr Spenlow being asleep) that Dora is paying her a visit of some little duration next day and that he may call. He does so, proposes, and is accepted; and it is agreed that the matter shall for the time being be kept secret from Mr Spenlow.

But I am sure the idea never entered my head then, that there was anything dishonourable in that.

When I walked about, exalted with my secret, and full of my own interest, and felt the dignity of loving Dora, and of being beloved, so much, that if I had walked the air, I could not have been more above the people not so situated, who were creeping on the earth!

When we had those meetings in the garden of the square, and sat within the dingy summer-house, so happy, that I love the London sparrows to this hour, for nothing else, and see the plumage of the tropics in their smoky feathers!

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When we had our first great quarrel (within a week of our betrothal), and when Dora sent me back the ring, enclosed in a despairing cocked-hat note, wherein she used the terrible expression that "our love had begun in folly, and ended in madness!" which dreadful words occasioned me to tear my hair, and cry that all was over!

When, under cover of the night, I flew to Miss Mills, whom I saw by stealth in a back kitchen where there was a mangle, and implored Miss Mills to interpose between us and avert insanity. When Miss Mills undertook the office and returned with Dora, exhorting us, from the pulpit of her own bitter youth, to mutual concession, and the avoidance of the desert of Sahara!

When we cried, and made it up, and were so blest again, that the back-kitchen, mangle and all, changed to Love's own temple, where we arranged a plan of correspondence through Miss Mills, always to comprehend at least one letter on each side every day!

What an idle time! What an unsubstantial, happy, foolish time! Of all the times of mine that Time has in his grip, there is none that in one retrospect I can smile at half so much, and think of half so tenderly.

DAVID "A BEGGAR" AND DORA ALARMED.

In the meantime, as related in the sketch, *Betsy Trotwood*, David's aunt has lost her fortune and has come to live at David's chambers. David with all the best possible intentions—imbued perhaps with the heroic idea of showing Dora the manhood he was made of, visits her at Julia Mills's house and without the slightest preparation asks her if she can love a beggar.

Here David has his first experience of Dora's thorough ignorance of things worldly.

My pretty, little, startled Dora! Her only association with the word was a yellow face and a nightcap, or a pair of crutches, or a wooden leg, or a dog with a

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decanter-stand in his mouth, or something of that kind; and she stared at me with the most delightful wonder.

"How can you ask me anything so foolish?" pouted Dora. "Love a beggar!"

"Dora, my own dearest!" said I. "*I am a beggar!*"

"How can you be such a silly thing," replied Dora, slapping my hand, "as to sit there, telling such stories? I'll make Jip bite you!"

Her childish way was the most delicious way in the world to me, but it was necessary to be explicit, and I solemnly repeated:

"Dora, my own life, I am your ruined David!"

"I declare I'll make Jip bite you!" said Dora, shaking her curls, "if you are so ridiculous."

But I looked so serious, that Dora left off shaking her curls, and laid her trembling little hand upon my shoulder, and first looked scared and anxious, then began to cry. That was dreadful. I fell upon my knees before the sofa, caressing her, and imploring her not to rend my heart; but, for some time, poor little Dora did nothing but exclaim Oh dear! Oh dear! And oh, she was so frightened! And where was Julia Mills! And oh, take her to Julia Mills, and go away, please!

He gets her round at length after much protestation, and then she shows the whimsicality of her ignorance.

"Don't talk about being poor, and working hard!" said Dora, nestling closer to me. "Oh, don't don't!"

"My dearest love," said I, "the crust well-earned—"

"Oh, yes; but I don't want to hear any more about crusts!" said Dora. "And Jip must have a mutton-chop every day at twelve, or he'll die!"

I was charmed with her childish, winning way. I fondly explained to Dora that Jip should have his mutton-chop with his accustomed regularity.

Still with the egotism of the young he will only see his

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side of the picture—and cannot visualise the utter impossibility of making Dora see in the same way.

“If you will sometimes think that you are engaged to a poor man and look about now and then at your papa’s housekeeping, and endeavour to acquire a little habit—of accounts, for instance—”

Poor little Dora received this suggestion with something that was half a sob and half a scream.

“—It would be so useful to us afterwards,” I went on. “And if you would promise me to read a little—a little Cookery Book that I would send you, it would be so excellent for both of us. For our path in life, my Dora,” said I, warming with the subject, “is stony and rugged now, and it rests with us to smooth it. We must fight our way onward. We must be brave. There are obstacles to be met, and we must meet, and crush them!”

I was going on at a great rate, with a clenched hand, and a most enthusiastic countenance; but it was quite unnecessary to proceed. I had said enough. I had done it again. Oh, she was so frightened! Oh, where was Julia Mills! Oh, take me to Julia Mills, and go away, please! So that, in short, I was quite distracted, and raved about the drawing-room.

Julia comes in and effects a reconciliation and all is peace and happiness again till David unluckily intimates that he is rising at five next morning to work.

Whether Dora had any idea that I was a Private Watchman, I am unable to say; but it made a great impression on her, and she neither played nor sang any more.

It was still on her mind when I bade her adieu; and she said to me, in her pretty coaxing way—as if I were a doll, I used to think—

“Now don’t get up at five o’clock, you naughty boy. It’s so nonsensical!”

“My love,” said I, “I have work to do.”

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"But don't do it!" returned Dora. "Why should you?"

It was impossible to say to that sweet little surprised face, otherwise than lightly and playfully, that we must work, to live.

"Oh! How ridiculous!" cried Dora.

"How shall we live without, Dora?" said I.

"How? Anyhow!" said Dora.

Now David, you know all there is to be known of your future wife's utter incapacity to understand or appreciate the rough paths of this world; it and all the rest—the praise, the blame, the happiness or the misery—is with you.

MISS MURDSTONE'S MALEVOLENCE.

Notwithstanding Dora's request, David does start working, as he described it, like a cart-horse; his chief occupation when he is not at Doctors' Commons, being to learn shorthand, to fit him for an ambition he had, to report the Parliamentary Debates. All is going well when one morning on reaching his office he finds Mr Spenlow standing in the doorway; and, instead of returning David's "good-morning" with his usual affability, coldly requests him to accompany him to a neighbouring coffee-house, in which, in an upper room, is seated Miss Murdstone. He then knows that all about himself and Dora has been discovered.

It is indeed so; for Mr Spenlow at once commences hostilities by asking Miss Murdstone to hand to David a parcel of letters, tied round with blue ribbon.

"If I am not mistaken," said Mr Spenlow, "those are also from your pen, Mr Copperfield?"

I took them from her with a most desolate sensation; and, glancing at such phrases at the top, as "My ever dearest and own Dora," "My best beloved angel," "My blessed one for ever," and the like, blushed deeply, and inclined my head.

"No, thank you!" said Mr Spenlow, coldly, as I

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mechanically offered them back to him. "I will not deprive you of them. Miss Murdstone, be so good as to proceed!"

Then does Miss Murdstone explain how she has long entertained suspicions of David and Dora, but has had no tangible proof till the latter's return from her visit to Julia, when she notices that many more letters than usual are being received from that young lady.

"Last evening after tea," pursued Miss Murdstone, "I observed the little dog starting, rolling, and growling about the drawing-room, worrying something. I said to Miss Spenlow, 'Dora, what is that the dog has in his mouth? It's a paper.' Miss Spenlow immediately put her hand to her frock, gave a sudden cry, and ran to the dog. I interposed, and said, 'Dora, my love, you must permit me.'"

Oh, Jip, miserable Spaniel, this wretchedness, then, was your work!

"Miss Spenlow endeavoured," said Miss Murdstone, "to bribe me with kisses, work-boxes, and small articles of jewellery—that, of course, I pass over. The little dog retreated under the sofa on my approaching him, and was with great difficulty dislodged by the fire-irons. Even when dislodged, he still kept the letter in his mouth; and on my endeavouring to take it from him, at the imminent risk of being bitten, he kept it between his teeth so pertinaciously as to suffer himself to be held suspended in the air by means of the document. At length I obtained possession of it. After perusing it, I taxed Miss Spenlow with having many such letters in her possession; and ultimately obtained from her, the packet which is now in David Copperfield's hand."

After some conversation, during which David earnestly pleads for time to improve his position, urging that he and Dora are both very young:

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"You are right," interrupted Mr Spenlow, nodding his head a great many times, and frowning very much, "you are both very young. It's all nonsense. Let there be an end of the nonsense. Take away those letters, and throw them in the fire. Give me Miss Spenlow's letters to throw in the fire; and although our future intercourse must, you are aware, be restricted to the Commons here, we will agree to make no further mention of the past. Come, Mr Copperfield, you don't want sense; and this is the sensible course."

No. I couldn't think of agreeing to it. I was very sorry, but there was a higher consideration than sense. Love was above all earthly considerations, and I loved Dora to idolatry, and Dora loved me. I didn't exactly say so; I softened it down as much as I could; but I implied it, and I was resolute upon it. I don't think I made myself very ridiculous, but I know I was resolute.

Then Mr Spenlow is guilty of a stupendous piece of hypocrisy. Premising that he had property to bequeath to Dora, and that his testamentary arrangements are made, he adds with a decidedly pious air :

"I should not allow," said Mr Spenlow, with an evident increase of pious sentiment, and slowly shaking his head as he poised himself upon his toes and heels alternately, "my suitable provision for my child to be influenced by a piece of youthful folly like the present. It is mere folly. Mere nonsense. In a little while, it will weigh lighter than any feather. But I might—I might—if this silly business were not completely relinquished altogether, be induced in some anxious moment to guard her from, and surround her with protections against, the consequences of, any foolish step in the way of marriage. Now, Mr Copperfield, I hope that you will not render it necessary for me to open, even for a quarter of an hour, that closed page in the book of life, and unsettle, even for a quarter of an hour, grave affairs long since composed."

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There was a serenity, a tranquillity, a calm-sunset air about him, which quite affected me. He was so peaceful and resigned—clearly had his affairs in such perfect train, and so systematically wound up—that he was a man to feel touched in the contemplation of. I really think I saw tears rise to his eyes, from the depth of his own feeling of all this.

The next day he is picked up on the road from Norwood—dead. And will it be believed that not only is there no will to be found, but that, so far as his private papers are concerned, he has never formed the intention of making one; further, incredible as it may seem, his affairs are in the utmost disorder; so that after the sale of his furniture and lease at Norwood, and the payment of his just debts, there is barely a thousand pounds outstanding. What a marvellous piece of self-deception!

DORA'S AUNTS.

Mr Spenlow has two maiden sisters—both his senior—living out at Putney, and with these Dora goes to stay when all is settled at Norwood—Julia Mills having to accompany her father to India. These two sisters—respectively named Clarissa and Lavinia—have had some deadly feud with their brother on some such important matter as the omission of an invitation to a certain dinner at Norwood, and thenceforth they were strangers. With these David has communicated, and, in response to a reply, he and Traddles (an old schoolfellow—now a barrister of the Inner Temple) go to interview them. Miss Lavinia Spenlow, being credited with once having had an affair of the heart, conducts the negotiations on behalf of self and sister, and it is finally arranged that David, pledging himself to hold no communication with Dora of which the aunts are not cognisant, shall be permitted to visit his beloved every Sunday and twice during the week (afterwards commuted to Saturday afternoon in view of the calls on his time), his aunt, Betsy Trotwood, to call and establish proper official relations.

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All these things being arranged, David is allowed to see his Dora; and on one of his visits is charmed at being asked by her—of her own accord—for that cookery book which had led to such hysterics the last time it was mentioned.

But the cookery-book made Dora's head ache, and the figures made her cry. They wouldn't add up, she said. So she rubbed them out, and drew little nosegays, and likenesses of me and Jip, all over the tablets.

Then I playfully tried verbal instruction in domestic matters, as we walked about on a Saturday afternoon. Sometimes, for example, when we passed a butcher's shop, I would say:

"Now suppose, my pet, that we were married, and you were going to buy a shoulder of mutton for dinner, would you know how to buy it?"

My pretty little Dora's face would fall, and she would make her mouth into a bud again, as if she would very much prefer to shut mine with a kiss.

"Would you know how to buy it, my darling?" I would repeat, perhaps, if I were very inflexible.

Dora would think a little, and then reply, perhaps, with great triumph:

"Why, the butcher would know how to sell it, and what need I know? Oh, you silly Boy!"

So, when I once asked Dora, with an eye to the cookery-book, what she would do, if we were married, and I were to say I should like a nice Irish stew, she replied that she would tell the servant to make it; and then clapped her little hands together across my arm, and laughed in such a charming manner that she was more delightful than ever.

Consequently, the principal use to which the cookery-book was devoted, was being put down in the corner for Jip to stand upon. But Dora was so pleased, when she had trained him to stand upon it without offering to come off, and at the same time to hold the pencil-case in his mouth, that I was very glad I had bought it.

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LITTLE BLOSSOM.

They are duly married and settle down in their little cottage. And stern, grim, gnarled Aunt Betsy Trotwood christens Dora "Little Blossom."

Such a beautiful little house as it is, with everything so bright and new; with the flowers on the carpets looking as if freshly gathered, and the green leaves on the paper as if they had just come out; with the spotless muslin curtains, and the blushing rose-coloured furniture, and Dora's garden hat with the blue ribbon—do I remember, now, how I loved her in such another hat when I first knew her!—already hanging on its little peg; the guitar-case quite at home on its heels in a corner; and everybody tumbling over Jip's Pagoda, which is much too big for the establishment.

They have many troubles with all sorts and conditions of servants—but one or two instances will suffice.

I doubt whether two young birds could have known less about keeping house, than I and my pretty Dora did. We had a servant, of course. She kept house for us. I have still a latent belief that she must have been Mrs Crupp's daughter in disguise, we had such an awful time of it with Mary Anne.

Her name was Paragon. Her nature was represented to us, when we engaged her, as being feebly expressed in her name. She had a written character, as large as a proclamation; and, according to this document, could do everything of a domestic nature that ever I heard of, and a great many things that I never did hear of. She was a woman in the prime of life; of a severe countenance; and subject (particularly in the arms) to a sort of perpetual measles or fiery rash. She had a cousin in the Life Guards, with such long legs that he looked like the afternoon shadow of somebody else. His shell-jacket was as

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much too little for him as he was too big for the premises. He made the cottage smaller than it need have been, by being so very much out of proportion to it. Besides which, the walls were not thick, and whenever he passed the evening at our house, we always knew of it by hearing one continual growl in the kitchen.

Our treasure was warranted sober and honest. I am therefore willing to believe that she was in a fit when we found her under the boiler; and that the deficient teaspoons were attributable to the dustman.

This cousin, by the way, deserts—into David's coal-hole; from which he is taken, handcuffed, by a picket of his companions-in-arms. The "Paragon" herself leaves mildly enough on receipt of her full wages—and well she might, seeing the teaspoons that are missing and the various sums of money she has borrowed from tradespeople in the name of Mr and Mrs Copperfield.

Everybody we had anything to do with seemed to cheat us. Our appearance in a shop was a signal for the damaged goods to be brought out immediately. If we bought a lobster, it was full of water. All our meat turned out to be tough, and there was hardly any crust to our loaves. In search of the principle on which joints ought to be roasted, to be roasted enough, and not too much, I myself referred to the Cookery Book, and found it there established as the allowance of a quarter of an hour to every pound, and say a quarter over. But the principle always failed us by some curious fatality, and we never could hit any medium between redness and cinders.

I had reason to believe that in accomplishing these failures we incurred a far greater expense than if we had achieved a series of triumphs. It appeared to me, on looking over the tradesmen's books, as if we might have kept the basement story paved with butter, such was the extensive scale of our consumption of that article. I don't

know whether the Excise returns of the period may have exhibited any increase in the demand for pepper; but if our performances did not affect the market, I should say several families must have left off using it. And the most wonderful fact of all was, that we never had anything in the house.

As to the washerwoman pawning the clothes, and coming in a state of penitent intoxication to apologise, I suppose that might have happened several times to anybody. Also the chimney on fire, the parish engine, and perjury on the part of the Beadle. But I apprehend that we were personally unfortunate in engaging a servant with a taste for cordials, who swelled our running account for porter at the public-house by such inexplicable items as "quartern rum shrub (Mrs C)"; "Half-quartern gin and cloves (Mrs C)"; "Glass rum and peppermint (Mrs C)"—the parentheses always referring to Dora, who was supposed, it appeared on explanation, to have imbibed the whole of these refreshments.

CHILD-WIFE.

It is not to be supposed that Dora does not notice and feel acutely her shortcomings. One night, after a perfectly disreputable failure of a dinner given to Traddles, in which the oysters are sent in unopened—with no appliances with which to open them—and the boiled mutton is so raw that all they can eat is the capers, she plants her chair close to David, and, nestling up to him, says :

"Will you call me a name I want you to call me?"

"What is it?" I asked with a smile.

"It's a stupid name," she said, shaking her curls for a moment. "Child-wife."

I laughingly asked my child-wife what her fancy was in desiring to be so called. She answered without moving, otherwise than as the arm I twined about her may have brought her blue eyes nearer to me :

"I don't mean, you silly fellow, that you should use the

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name instead of Dora. I only mean that you should think of me that way. When you are going to be angry with me, say to yourself. 'it's only my child-wife!' When I am very disappointing, say, 'I knew, a long time ago, that she would make but a child-wife!' When you miss what I should like to be, and I think can never be, say, 'still, my foolish child-wife loves me!' For indeed I do."

I had not been serious with her; having no idea, until now, that she was serious herself. But her affectionate nature was so happy in what I now said to her with my whole heart, that her face became a laughing one before her glittering eyes were dry. She was soon my child-wife indeed; sitting down on the floor outside the Chinese House, ringing all the little bells one after another, to punish Jip for his recent bad behaviour; while Jip lay blinking in the doorway with his head out, even too lazy to be teased.

This appeal of Dora's made a strong impression on me. I look back on the time I write of; I invoke the innocent figure that I dearly loved, to come out from the mists and shadows of the past, and turn its gentle head towards me once again; and I can still declare that this one little speech was constantly in my memory. I may not have used it to the best account; I was young and inexperienced; but I never turned a deaf ear to its artless pleading.

PLEASE LET ME HOLD THE PENS.

No matter how late it is when David reaches home—and he is often very late now he has achieved his desire and is occupied on the Parliamentary Debates—Dora comes down to meet him; and when he is engaged in writing at home, she sits near him, looking at him with loving quiet attention.

"Oh, what a weary boy!" said Dora one night, when I met her eyes as I was shutting up my desk.

"What a weary girl!" said I. "That's more to the purpose. You must go to bed another time, my love. It's far too late for you."

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"No, don't send me to bed!" pleaded Dora, coming to my side. "Pray, don't do that!"

"Dora!"

To my amazement she was sobbing on my neck.

"Not well, my dear! not happy!"

"Yes! quite well, and very happy!" said Dora. "But say you'll let me stop, and see you write."

"Why, what a sight for such bright eyes at midnight!" I replied.

"Are they bright, though?" returned Dora, laughing.

"I'm so glad they're bright."

"Little Vanity!" said I.

But it was not vanity; it was only harmless delight in my admiration. I knew that very well, before she told me so.

"If you think them pretty, say I may always stop, and see you write!" said Dora. "*Do* you think them pretty?"

"Very pretty."

"Then let me always stop and see you write."

"I am afraid that won't improve their brightness, Dora."

"Yes it will! Because, you clever boy, you'll not forget me then, while you are full of silent fancies. Will you mind it, if I say something very, very silly?—more than usual?" inquired Dora, peeping over my shoulder into my face.

"What wonderful thing is that?" said I.

"Please let me hold the pens," said Dora. "I want to have something to do with all those many hours when you are so industrious. May I hold the pens?"

The remembrance of her pretty joy when I said Yes, brings tears into my eyes. The next time I sat down to write, and regularly afterwards, she sat in her old place, with a spare bundle of pens at her side. Her triumph in this connexion with my work, and her delight when I wanted a new pen—which I very often feigned to do—suggested to me a new way of pleasing my child-wife. I

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occasionally made a pretence of wanting a page of two of manuscript copied. Then Dora was in her glory. The preparations she made for this great work, the aprons she put on, the bibs she borrowed from the kitchen to keep off the ink, the time she took, the innumerable stoppages she made to have a laugh with Jip as if he understood it all, her conviction that her work was incomplete unless she signed her name at the end, and the way in which she would bring it to me, like a school-copy, and then, when I praised it, clasp me round the neck, are touching recollections to me, simple as they might appear to other men.

She took possession of the keys soon after this, and went jingling about the house with the whole bunch in a little basket, tied to her slender waist. I seldom found that the places to which they belonged were locked, or that they were of any use except as a plaything for Jip—but Dora was pleased, and that pleased me. She was quite satisfied that a good deal was effected by this make-belief of house-keeping: and was as merry as if we had been keeping a baby-house, for a joke.

And stern, grim, gnarled Aunt Betsy Trotwood never comes into the house, but what she calls out, in a voice that sounds cheerfully all over the house: "Where's Little Blossom?"

AN ACHING VOID.

That David is as kind, considerate and affectionate a husband as could be wished, there is no room for doubt; and when, as he sometimes does, he checks her tendency to playfulness and insists upon her being sternly practical, the sight of her, so scared and disconsolate, brings back the memory of her natural gaiety when he first met her; then he remembers that she is but his child-wife, and, laying aside his practical air, asks for her guitar.

But he is not without a strange feeling of an unhappy loss or want of something. He has had the same indefinable feeling months before—in the first flush of his overwhelm-

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ing love for Dora—after a conversation (about Dora) with Agnes; when going into the street, thinking of the calm, seraphic eyes of Agnes, he is startled to hear a beggar-man muttering: "Blind! Blind! Blind!" And again the same feeling has come over him—still deeply steeped in love for Dora—when Mr Micawber says to him casually that if his beloved's name had not commenced with a "D," he would have thought it commenced with an "A."

The fact is that David was wanting—though he does not know it—a combination of the beautiful child-wife Dora, and the calm, sagacious, practical, seraphic Agnes. In short he was wanting perfection; and he only got it in two instalments. Lucky man at that!

SPECULATIONS AND CONJECTURES.

These following few paragraphs show the trend of his mind; and it seems to me that two phrases of Annie Strong's confession to her aged husband had the effect of rather poisoning the atmosphere of David's domestic happiness:

Sometimes, the speculation came into my thoughts, What might have happened, or what would have happened, if Dora and I had never known each other? But, she was so incorporated with my existence, that it was the idlest of all fancies, and would soon rise out of my reach and sight, like gossamer floating in the air.

I always loved her. What I am describing, slumbered, and half awoke, and slept again, in the innermost recesses of my mind. There was no evidence of it in me; I know of no influence it had in anything I said or did. I bore the weight of all our little cares, and all my projects; Dora held the pens; and we both felt that our shares were adjusted as the case required. She was truly fond of me, and proud of me; and when Agnes wrote a few earnest words in her letters to Dora, of the pride and interest with which my old friends heard of my growing reputation, Dora read them out to me with tears of joy in her

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bright eyes, and said I was a dear old clever, famous boy.

"The first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart." Those words of Mrs Strong's were constantly recurring to me, at this time; were almost always present to my mind. I awoke with them, often, in the night; I remember to have even read them, in dreams, inscribed upon the walls of houses. For I knew, now, that my own heart was undisciplined when it first loved Dora; and that of it had been disciplined, it never could have felt, when we were married, what it had felt in its secret experience.

"There can be no disparity in marriage, like unsuitability of mind and purpose." Those words I remembered too. I had endeavoured to adapt Dora to myself, and found it impracticable. It remained for me to adapt myself to Dora; to share with her what I could, and be happy; to bear on my own shoulders what I must, and be still happy. This was the discipline to which I tried to bring my heart, when I began to think. It made my second year much happier than my first; and, what was better still, made Dora's life all sunshine.

But, as that year wore on, Dora was not strong. I had hoped that lighter hands than mine would help to mould her character, and that a baby-smile upon her breast might change my child-wife to a woman. It was not to be. The spirit fluttered for a moment on the threshold of its little prison, and, unconscious of captivity, took wing.

The possibility of Dora as a mother opens up a vast field of conjecture. Supposing that miracle to have happened! Imagine the child-wife nursing a child; and again, imagine the wise little child educating, by its mere existence, the unwise child-mother, till she eventually becomes a real help-meet to her husband! I think Dora would have made a splendid mother. What a vista of domestic felicity Dickens, by his wondrous artistry, might have conjured up—had he been so minded. But it was not to be. No baby must nestle on Dora's breast, and Dora must die that David's

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happiness may be completed in the possession of the ever-wise, ever calm, ever seraphic Agnes.

Let there be no mistake as to my meaning. Never once does David falter in his fealty to Dora. Never once does he realise that his vague, unsatisfied longings mean dissatisfaction with, or disloyalty to, Dora. I do not believe that any thought of Agnes as a potential factor in his life's happiness—save as a loving sister—ever enters his mind, or clouds his happiness with his wife. He only knows there is something missing; but in his mind there is no regret for a tangible "might-have-been," for no tangible might-have-been is present to his mind.

DORA'S WISDOM.

Dickens wrote many beautifully pathetic death scenes; those of Paul Dombey and Little Nell will, I suppose, ever hold first place; but David's parting with Dora is, to me, so infinitely touching and tender that I hesitate to say a word about it. Indeed who is there that could add anything to its pathos? But I hope it is not irreverent of me to say that it is drama at its highest and tensest. At the moment when the dog Jip, having stretched himself out at David's feet, as if to sleep, with a little plaintive cry, dies, Agnes enters the room, and, with upraised hand, mutely announces Dora's death.

It is night; and I am with her still. Agnes has arrived; has been among us, for a whole day and an evening. She, my aunt, and I, have sat with Dora since the morning, all together. We have not talked much, but Dora has been perfectly contented and cheerful. We are now alone.

Do I know, now, that my child-wife will soon leave me? They have told me so; they have told me nothing new to my thoughts; but I am far from sure that I have taken that truth to heart. I cannot master it. I have withdrawn by myself, many times to-day, to weep. I have remembered Who wept for a parting between the living and the dead. I have bethought me of all that gracious

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and compassionate history. I have tried to resign myself, and to console myself; and that, I hope, I may have done imperfectly; but what I cannot firmly settle in my mind is, that the end will absolutely come. I hold her hand in mine, I hold her heart in mine, I see her love for me, alive in all its strength. I cannot shut out a pale lingering shadow of belief that she will be spared.

"I am going to speak to you, Doady. I am going to say something I have often thought of saying, lately. You won't mind?" with a gentle look.

"Mind, my darling?"

"Because I don't know what you will think, or what you may have thought sometimes. Perhaps you have often thought the same. Doady, dear, I am afraid I was too young."

I lay my face upon the pillow by her, and she looks into my eyes, and speaks very softly. Gradually, as she goes on, I feel, with a stricken heart, that she is speaking of herself as past.

"I am afraid, dear, I was too young. I don't mean in years only, but in experience, and thoughts, and everything. I was such a silly little creature! I am afraid it would have been better, if we had only loved each other as a boy and girl, and forgotten it. I have begun to think I was not fit to be a wife."

I try to stay my tears, and to reply, "Oh, Dora, love, as fit as I to be a husband!"

"I don't know," with the old shake of her curls. "Perhaps! But, if I had been more fit to be married, I might have made you more so, too. Besides, you are very clever, and I never was."

"We have been very happy, my sweet Dora."

"I was very happy, very. But, as years went on, my dear boy would have wearied of his child-wife. She would have been less and less a companion for him. He would have been more and more sensible of what was wanting in his home. She wouldn't have improved. It is better as it is."

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"Oh, Dora, dearest, dearest, do not speak to me so. Every word seems a reproach!"

"No, not a syllable!" she answers, kissing me. "Oh, my dear, you never deserved it, and I loved you far too well, to say a reproachful word to you, in earnest—it was all the merit I had, except being pretty—or you thought me so. Is it lonely, down-stairs, Doady?"

"Very! Very!"

"Don't cry! Is my chair there?"

"In its old place."

"Oh, how my poor boy cries! Hush, hush! Now, make me one promise. I want to speak to Agnes. When you go down-stairs, tell Agnes so, and send her up to me; and while I speak to her, let no one come—not even aunt. I want to speak to Agnes by herself. I want to speak to Agnes, quite alone."

I promise that she shall, immediately; but I cannot leave her, for my grief.

"I said that it was better as it is!" she whispers, as she holds me in her arms. "Oh, Doady, after more years, you never could have loved your child-wife better than you do; and, after more years, she would so have tried and disappointed you, that you might not have been able to love her half so well! I know I was too young and foolish. It is much better as it is!"

Perhaps it is. She is dying and sees things with the wisdom of the ages at her command. She remains a wonderful creation—a delicious fancy—an idyll. To me the memory of Dora is the memory of a girl of singular purity—of one who never had a thought outside home and husband. Of her it might be truly said:

"The dread path once trod,
Heaven lifts its everlasting portals high,
And bids the pure in heart behold their God."

XI

LIZZIE HEXAM.

(From *Our Mutual Friend*)

EXPLANATION OF CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN THIS SKETCH.

Akersham, Sophronia—Married to A. Lammle.

Boffin, Nicodemus—The Golden Dustman; heir to the "Harmon" thousands.

Cleaver, Fanny—"Jenny Wren," the Doll's Dressmaker, and friend of Lizzie Hexam.

Fledgeby, "Fascination"—Otherwise "Pubsy & Co.," moneylenders.

Harmon, John—*Alias* John Rokesmith; supposed to be dead; prospective heir to the Harmon property.

Headstone, Bradley—Schoolmaster; suitor for the hand of Lizzie Hexam.

Hexam, Jesse ("Gaffer")—Father to Lizzie and Charlie Hexam; "Fisher" for dead bodies in the Thames.

Hexam, Lizzie—First pursued and then loved by Eugene Wrayburn.

Hexam, Charley—Pupil and friend of Bradley Headstone, whom he wishes his sister to marry.

Lammle, Alfred—Adventurer.

Lightwood, Mortimer—Solicitor and bosom friend of Eugene Wrayburn.

Milvey, Rev. Frank—Clergyman.

Riderhood, Roger—"Rogue" Riderhood; despicable Thames-side character and blackmailer.

Veneering, Hamilton—Brand-new Society man.

Wegg, Silas—A wooden-legged vendor of ballads.

Wilfer, Reginald—Father of Bella Wilfer.

Wrayburn, Eugene—Briefless barrister and purposeless Man-about-Town.

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Our Mutual Friend is notable for the fact that in its publication Dickens reverted to his old plan of issuing a book in monthly parts. The first part was issued in May, 1864, and the last in November, 1865, being published in book form in the latter month. "Not the creative power which crowded his first works" (Forster); "Whole episodes and parts of the plot . . . are ill adapted for giving pleasure to any reader" (A. W. Ward); "Not at his best. A strange complicated story that seems to have some difficulty in unravelling itself" (Marzials); "Brings us back a little into his merrier and more normal manner" (Chesterton). These are some of the criticism passed upon Dickens's last completed work. For my part I am altogether with Chesterton.

I have a reason for this, quite apart from the merits of the book. *Our Mutual Friend* was the first novel of Dickens that I read—at the age of twelve or thirteen. I read it in two evenings; neglecting my home-lessons to do so, and received a severe caning in consequence. I also read it in bed by the aid of a candle (stolen), for which breach of household laws I received the attentions of my father's slipper; all possible reasons for this book having a cherished place in my memory.

But whatever "absence of creative power" it may possess, however "ill-adapted it may be to give pleasure to the reader," however "complicated" the story may be, in the opinion of others, to my mind it is a delightful story which grips the imagination from beginning to end. If it has one fault at all it is that too much attention is paid to plot—and plot is Dickens's weak suit. But I see no falling off in masterly delineation of character. We have that arch-

impostor, toady, ingrate and humbug, the one-legged Silas Wegg, with his intimate knowledge of "Decline-and-Fall-Off-The-Rooshan-Empire," with his dropping into poetry, quoting from the Ballads he sold and adding the name of Mr and Mrs Boffin (his benefactors) at the end of a line occasionally, to show he does it in a friendly spirit. We have the evergreen Mr Boffin—"the Golden Dustman"—heir to the miserable and tyrannous Harmon's thousands. It is objected that when Dickens makes this simple, ignorant, open-hearted man suddenly turn niggard, reading, or having read to him by Wegg, the lives of all the celebrated misers—he does something that is impossible, or inartistic, or both. But what matter? It makes excellent reading—and that, after all, is the great purpose of a novel.

And have we not those two great frauds—Mr and Mrs Alfred Lammle? Frauds to each other—frauds to society? Each, having nothing, marrying the other on the supposition of the existence of ample means and only finding out the mistake on the honeymoon. Repulsive characters; but redeemed from utter vileness by the punishment they mete out to "Fascination Fledgeby"—an odious reptile with a young man's form and an old miser's heart. That is the occasion on which Jenny Wren visits Fledgeby at his chambers in the Albany—finds a lady at the door holding a gentleman's hat—is detained till its owner comes out looking very hot and dishevelled—is presented with the pieces of a broken cane to hand to Fledgeby "with Mr Alfred Lammle's compliments on leaving England"—goes into Fledgeby's room, and, finding him rolling about the floor in agony, spluttering and choking and crowing fearfully—all the results of being beaten black and blue with the aforesaid cane and of having a mixture of salt and snuff rubbed up his nose and down his throat—pickles him in brown paper and vinegar, adding a dash of pepper—because she thinks "the young man's tricks and manners make a claim upon his friends for a little pepper"—and leaves him smarting, "plunging and gambolling all over his bed like a porpoise or dolphin in its native element." That well-deserved punishment makes us almost

inclined to pass a vote of thanks to Mr and Mrs Lammle for being the instruments of retributive justice. Not that their villainy is the less—but that Fledgeby's is the greater.

Then there is Mrs Wilfer—the “majestic ma” of Bella, the heroine of the story; with her lugubrious recollections of the forebodings of her papa and mamma that she will end in marrying a little man; and her oratorical statements, such as “I have rarely seen a finer woman than my mother; *never than my father.*” Being tall and dignified, her husband is naturally small and cherubic (he is nicknamed “Rumpty”), and of course these utterances are made at the family festival held in honour of the anniversary of her wedding-day.

Bella Wilfer would have made an entrancing subject for a sketch if it had happened that her story had been bound up with that of the real hero of the novel; for that is not John Harmon (or Rokesmith—the name under which he woos and wins Bella) but Eugene Wrayburn—the idle, drifting, seemingly purposeless barrister, whose relations with the poor, beautiful, pure Lizzie Hexam overshadow in interest the courtship and marriage of Bella Wilfer.

Even were *Our Mutual Friend* one of Dickens's worst novels, instead of, as I believe it to be, one of his best, would there be much to be wondered at? For thirty years he had been the idol of the English-speaking race, producing masterpiece after masterpiece, editing and conducting one after the other—*Master Humphrey's Clock*, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, travelling much on the Continent and giving readings of his works in every part of the British Isles, besides paying two long visits to America. A fairly crowded life is it not? Add to it then some years of domestic unhappiness, remember that while writing *Our Mutual Friend* his foot was giving him such serious trouble that he had in great part to abandon those long walks which were as the breath of his life, and also remember that at this time he was in a terrible railway accident which shook him dreadfully. Then the marvel will be—not that the book is on a par with his best, but that it is not his actual worst.

SOME DICKENS WOMEN

Our Mutual Friend is redolent of the Thames-side—that part lying between Westminster and Limehouse—particularly Limehouse; for it was in that much-maligned quarter that Dickens spent many happy hours with his uncle, John Huffham—after whom he was named. The most sinister character in the book is an amphibious monster named Rogue Riderhood—who seems indeed to be created out of the very mud and slime and ooze of the river itself.

Another outstanding character is Bradley Headstone, the wretched schoolmaster whose passion for Lizzie Hexam is such a tragic—and touching—feature of the book. Whether there ever existed such a schoolmaster—beneath whose respectable exterior burned such raging, consuming fires—it is hardly possible to say; but he is a terrible example as to the frightful ends to which undisciplined love and hate will lead.

The character of Eugene Wrayburn is both complex and puzzling. He is an intensely interesting psychological study because the manner in which he is presented leads to an examination of the mentality of Dickens when creating him. Undoubtedly he loved him—revelled in him; tried to make him as amusing and attractive as he made Headstone terrible and repellant; tried to give us the picture of a careless, indolent gentleman. Because Dickens so loved Wrayburn, I hesitate to find fault with him, but I cannot reconcile his brutal, unmanly treatment of Headstone, nor his pursuit of Lizzie Hexam after she had hidden herself away from him, nor his bribing of that stupid old drunkard—Jenny Wren's father—to get him Lizzie's address, with the actions of a gentleman.

Eugene Wrayburn is not a gentleman—he is only gentlemanly—in parts.

THE MAN FROM SOMEWHERE.

Lizzie Hexam is one of Dickens's best women characters. Poor, strikingly beautiful, a devoted daughter, a fond and doting sister, so much in love with Eugene that she hides

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from him, and only marries him when he is supposed to be on his death-bed, she is the very picture of one of nature's noble women. It is a little difficult at first to understand how a girl, so brought up and in such surroundings as hers, with an ignorant father—so ignorant that he hated all learning—should be able to express herself in the refined manner in which she invariably spoke. To understand that we must understand Dickens. He believed that in some natures goodness was innate and manifested itself in the foulest surroundings. For example in *Oliver Twist* he wished to show—and succeeded—that the principle of Good, in little Oliver, could survive through every adverse circumstance, and would ultimately triumph. So with Lizzie Hexam's refinement of speech and manner. That was natural to her and remained unpolluted even amid her riverside surroundings and associations, even in the gruesome task of assisting her father to retrieve the bodies of the unfortunates drowned in the Thames.

That is where we first meet her; rowing her father's boat between Southwark Bridge and London Bridge, while he holds the rudder-lines and intently watches the river; ultimately finding the body of him who was supposed to be John Harmon—but who is in reality only someone resembling him in a remarkable manner. In the pockets of the corpse are documents—one of them mentioning the name of Mortimer Lightwood, solicitor.

Now that very evening Lightwood and his inseparable friend Eugene Wrayburn are dining with some brand-new people—the Veneerings, and Mortimer has been called upon to tell the Harmon Romance. He has arrived at the point that John Harmon is on his way home to succeed to a large fortune and marry a charming wife, when a note is handed to him by the butler. He reads it and says:

"This arrives in an extraordinarily opportune manner; this is the conclusion of the story of the identical man."

"Already married?" one guesses.

"Declines to marry?" another guesses.

"Codicil among the dust?" another guesses.

"Why, no," says Mortimer; "remarkable thing, you are all wrong. The story is completer and rather more exciting than I supposed. Man's drowned!"

THE HOLLOW DOWN BY THE FLARE.

It is Charley Hexam—Lizzie's brother—who has brought this note; and Mortimer and Eugene go somewhere adjacent to Rotherhithe to view the corpse. It is on this occasion that Eugene sees Lizzie for the first time.

Lizzie sees pictures in the fire; and the following picture which she is describing to her brother, after Mortimer and Eugene had gone away with "Gaffer" Hexam on the ghastly errand of identifying the body, is descriptive both of her life and her character :

"There are you and me, Charley, when you were quite a baby that never knew a mother——"

"Don't go saying I never knew a mother," interposed the boy, "for I knew a little sister that was sister and mother both."

The girl laughed delightedly, and her eyes filled with pleasant tears, as he put both his arms round her waist and so held her.

"There are you and me, Charley, when father was away at work and locked us out, for fear we should set ourselves afire or fall out of window, sitting on the door-sill, sitting on other door-steps, sitting on the bank of the river, wandering about to get through the time. You are rather heavy to carry, Charley, and I'm often obliged to rest. Sometimes we are sleepy and fall asleep together in a corner, sometimes we are very hungry, sometimes we are a little frightened, but what is oftenest hard upon us is the cold. You remember, Charley?"

"I remember," said the boy, pressing her to him twice or thrice, "that I snuggled under a little shawl, and it was warm there."

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"Sometimes it rains, and we creep under a boat or the like of that; sometimes it's dark, and we get among the gaslights, sitting watching the people as they go along the streets. At last, up comes father and takes us home. And home seems such a shelter after out of doors! And father pulls my shoes off, and dries my feet at the fire, and has me to sit by him while he smokes his pipe long after you are abed, and I notice that father's is a large hand but never a heavy one when it touches me, and that father's is a rough voice but never an angry one when it speaks to me. So, I grow up, and little by little father trusts me, and makes me his companion, and, let him be put out as he may, never once strikes me."

The girl has managed to get the boy some sort of education, secretly, because of the father's intense prejudice against all and any learning; and shortly after the above conversation she decides that it will be for his benefit to leave home altogether, and go to a school she has found for him. Her farewell words to him are characteristic of her intense loyalty:

"And above all things, mind this, Charley! Be sure you always speak well of father. Be sure you always give father his full due. You can't deny that because father has no learning himself he is set against it in you; but favour nothing else against him, and be sure you say—as you know—that your sister is devoted to him. And if you should ever happen to hear anything said against father that is new to you, it will not be true. Remember, Charley! It will not be true."

ENTER ROGUE RIDERHOOD.

Eugene's second meeting with Lizzie is under dramatic and tragic circumstances. He and Mortimer are smoking in the latter's chambers, after dinner, when they are visited by—

SOME DICKENS WOMEN

... an ill-looking visitor with a squinting leer, who, as he spoke, fumbled at an old sodden fur cap, formless and mangey, that looked like a furry animal, dog or cat, puppy or kitten, drowned and decaying.

This visitor, who introduces himself as "a man who gets his living by the sweat of his brow," explains the purport of his visit thus :

"I want to take a Alfred David,"

—which Eugene accurately interprets as meaning an affidavit.

The reason for making that affidavit is that there has just been offered by Mr Boffin (who succeeded to the Harmon thousands on the supposed death of John Harmon) a reward of ten thousand pounds for the discovery of the murderer of John Harmon. So Riderhood imparts to the two astonished lawyers the fact that he wishes to swear that Gaffer Hexam is the murderer, and that he knows it to be true because Hexam has told him so himself.

As solicitor to Mr Boffin it is Lightwood's duty to act upon this information—so he and Eugene and Riderhood make their way to Hexam's house—or hut—on the river shore at Rotherhithe. They first visit the police station and read Riderhood's information over to the inspector, who thinks it sufficient upon which to arrest Hexam, who has not yet returned home.

EUGENE AGAIN SEES LIZZIE.

Riderhood has reported that the girl is alone, sitting in front of the fire; and Eugene leaves his friend to discover if he can again see the lonely, lovely girl with the dark hair. This is what he sees as he looks through the window :

She had no other light than the light of the fire. The unkindled lamp stood on the table. She sat on the ground,

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looking at the brazier, with her face leaning on her hand. There was a kind of film or flicker on her face, which at first he took to be the fitful firelight; but, on a second look, he saw that she was weeping. A sad and solitary spectacle, as shown him by the rising and the falling of the fire.

It was a little window of but four pieces of glass, and was not curtained; he chose it because the larger window near it was. It showed him the room, and the bills upon the wall respecting the drowned people starting out and receding by turns. But he glanced slightly at them, though he looked long and steadily at her. A deep rich piece of colour, with the brown flush of her cheek and the shining lustre of her hair, though sad and solitary, weeping by the rising and the falling of the fire.

She started up. He had been so very still, that he felt sure it was not he who had disturbed her, so merely withdrew from the window and stood near it in the shadow of the wall. She opened the door, and said in an alarmed tone, "Father, was that you calling me?" And again, "Father!" And once again, after listening, "Father! I thought I heard you call me twice before!"

It is early morning before Gaffer's boat is discovered—empty, but dragging some awful burden behind—which on investigation proves to be the Gaffer himself. This fact is announced by Riderhood, who, viewing everything in the light of the rich reward, says:

"Gaffer's done me. It's Gaffer!"

They ran to the rope, leaving him gasping there. Soon, the form of the bird of prey, dead some hours, lay stretched upon the shore, with a new blast storming at it and clotting the wet hair with hailstones.

Father, was that you calling me? Father! I thought I heard you call me twice before! Words never to be answered, those, upon the earthside of the grave. The wind sweeps jeeringly over Father, whips him with the frayed ends of his dress and his jagged hair, tries to turn

him where he lies stark on his back, and force his face towards the rising sun, that he may be shamed the more.

Upon this discovery being made, Eugene disappears, and Mortimer does not see him again till much later in the day, when he turns up looking very dishevelled. He explains that he has merely got bored with himself and has been for a walk. In reality he has fetched a neighbour and broken the news to Lizzie in so kindly and thoughtful a manner that it makes an impression on her that remains indelible.

A THOROUGHLY DECENT YOUNG MAN.

Charley Hexam has obtained a place in a school, of which the headmaster is Bradley Headstone. Whether the description Dickens gives of this young man of six-and-twenty is an accurate picture of the schoolmaster of the 'sixties is difficult to say. Dickens has given us three schoolmasters: Squeers (*Nicholas Nickleby*), Creakle (*David Copperfield*), and Headstone. The one-eyed Squeers is a thorough-paced rascal—ignorant to the verge of amusement; but so real that many Yorkshire schoolmasters recognised caricatures of themselves in him and threatened actions for libel. The voiceless Creakle is an ogre with a positive lust for inflicting cruel punishment on his young charges; real enough though to bear a resemblance to Dickens's own schoolmaster. Headstone is neither rascal nor ogre; but with his red-hot love and his white-hot hate he is a horror. A pitiable horror it is true; but a horror all the same. Let us look at his picture:

Bradley Headstone, in his decent black coat and waistcoat, and decent white shirt, and decent formal black tie, and decent pantaloons of pepper and salt, with his decent silver watch in his pocket and its decent hair-guard round his neck, looked a thoroughly decent young man of six-and-twenty. He was never seen in any other dress, and yet there was a certain stiffness in his manner of wearing

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this, as if there were a want of adaptation between him and it, recalling some mechanics in their holiday clothes. He had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher's knowledge. He could do mental arithmetic mechanically, sing at sight mechanically, blow various wind instruments mechanically, even play the great church organ mechanically. From his early childhood up, his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage. The arrangement of his wholesale warehouse, so that it might be always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers—history here, geography there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left—natural history, the physical sciences, figures, music, the lower mathematics, and what not, all in their several places—this care had imparted to his countenance a look of care; while the habit of questioning and being questioned had given him a suspicious manner, or a manner that would be better described as one of lying in wait. There was a kind of settled trouble in the face. It was the face belonging to a naturally slow or inattentive intellect that had toiled hard to get what it had won, and that had to hold it now that it was gotten. He always seemed to be uneasy lest anything should be missing from his mental warehouse, and taking stock to assure himself.

BARRISTER AND SCHOOLMASTER MEET.

Charley has spoken to Bradley Headstone about his sister, and the latter is anxious that there should be no influences at work—even sisterly ones—that are incompatible with his ideal of respectability. Charley, one fatal evening, suggests that the schoolmaster should see Lizzie. This is assented to and they make their way to Church Street, Smith Square, Millbank, where Lizzie is lodging with a deformed young girl, whose name is Fanny Cleaver, but who calls herself "Jenny Wren." Her occupation is that of a doll's dressmaker.

Headstone is much struck with Lizzie's manner and conversation, for on their way back he says :

"Your sister scarcely looks or speaks like an ignorant person."

But her beauty has made a deep impression on him.

Charley has been speaking of her want of education and the need of giving her sufficient instruction to pass muster for his sister. Bradley with other thoughts altogether says :

"There is this possibility to consider. Some man who had worked his way might come to admire—your sister—and might even in time bring himself to think of marrying—your sister—and it would be a sad drawback and a heavy penalty upon him, if, overcoming in his mind other inequalities of condition and other considerations against it, this inequality and this consideration remained in full force."

Thinking thus he agrees to think out some project for educating Lizzie to the necessary respectable standard.

Whilst walking home they meet Eugene Wrayburn, who is described as—

... a gentleman who came coolly sauntering towards them, with a cigar in his mouth, his coat thrown back, and his hands behind him. Something in the careless manner of this person, and in a certain lazily arrogant air with which he approached, holding possession of twice as much pavement as another would have claimed, instantly caught the boy's attention.

Charley has had a dislike for Wrayburn from the first moment he saw him. He ascribes that hostile feeling to the fact that on that occasion Wrayburn had taken his chin in his hand and turned his face up. Perhaps a little of that and a great deal of it instinctive; nature's indefinable warning of the presence of an enemy.

Charley explains to Headstone who Wrayburn is and how they became acquainted.

Thus, casually, do schoolmaster and barrister casually

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meet and casually part; neither knowing how inextricably their lots are knitted together in the ravelled sleeve of fate; as little knowing that they are destined to be antagonists to the death, as they know that the beautiful but ignorant river girl will be the cause of sending the one to his death-bed and the other to a suicide's grave.

A SCHEME OF EDUCATION.

Headstone has opined to Charley that Wrayburn is on his way to see Lizzie. To which Charley replies :

"It can't be. He doesn't know her well enough. I should like to catch him at it."

And caught him at it he would had he turned back to Millbank, for Eugene is there, and there moreover to try and gain Lizzie's assent to a scheme for her and Jenny Wren, whereby he should pay a certain person of her own sex so many "contemptible shillings" to give them certain instruction.

Up to now Lizzie has not been able to see her way to adopting this scheme, and Eugene describes her attitude as one of false pride. He has elicited the fact that the stranger with Charley is his schoolmaster and he utilises that information by saying :

"True pride wouldn't have schoolmasters brought here, like doctors to look at a bad case."

Then with an appearance of earnestness, complete conviction, and generously unselfish interest, he touches cleverly the most subtle chord he could have sounded :

"Your false pride does wrong to yourself and does wrong to your dead father."

"How to my father, Mr Wrayburn?" she asked, with an anxious face.

SOME DICKENS WOMEN

"How to your father? Can you ask! By perpetuating the consequences of his ignorant and blind obstinacy. By resolving not to set right the wrong he did you. By determining that the deprivation to which he condemned you, and which he forced upon you, shall always rest upon his head."

The battle is won; for, after a few more kindly words, in which Eugene appears to be the soul of openness, trustfulness and unsuspecting generosity, Lizzie says:

"For myself and for Jenny I thankfully accept your kind offer."

In so simple a way begins that set of circumstances, which, leading up to insensate jealousy and unreasoning hate, ends in attempted murder, a death-bed wedding, murder and suicide.

A CONSULTATION IN CHAMBERS.

Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood are now living together in chambers in the Temple; and one evening they are sitting by the fire smoking, when Mortimer accuses Eugene of withholding something from him.

"All this past summer, you have been withholding something from me. Before we entered on our boating vacation, you were as bent upon it as I have seen you upon anything since we first rowed together. But you cared very little for it when it came, often found it a tie and a drag upon you, and were constantly away. Now it was well enough half-a-dozen times, a dozen times, twenty times, to say to me in your own odd manner, which I know so well and like so much, that your disappearances were precautions against our boring one another; but of course after a short while I began to know that they covered something. I don't ask what it is, as you have not told me; but the fact is so."

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Eugene has parried the question and Mortimer has just said that he hopes nothing is afoot either injurious to Eugene or to anyone else when two visitors make their appearance—Bradley Headstone and Charley Hexam, and the something withheld is made manifest. The boy is there to accuse Eugene of seeing a great deal too much of his sister.

Although they have never met except on the one casual occasion previously described, now they are face to face, Headstone and Wrayburn know each other for deadly enemies. Eugene inquires of Headstone who he is.

“I am Charles Hexam’s friend. I am Charles Hexam’s schoolmaster.”

Again asking Headstone’s name, that gentleman unfortunately replies :

“It can’t concern you much to know, but——”

“True,” interposed Eugene, cutting him short at his mistake, “it does not concern me at all to know. I can say Schoolmaster—which is a most respectable title.”

And “Schoolmaster” it is during the whole of that painful interview.

Throughout the entire conversation each keeps looking at the other—neither at the boy. There is some secret, sure, perception between them which sets them against one another in all ways.

This is the gravamen of the brother’s grievance :

“We had a plan, Mr Headstone and I, for my sister’s education, and for its being advised and overlooked by Mr Headstone, who is a much more competent authority, whatever you may pretend to think, as you smoke, than you could produce, if you tried. Then what do we find? What do we find, Mr Lightwood? Why, we find that my sister is already being taught, without our knowing it. We find that while my sister gives an unwilling and cold

ear to our schemes for her advantage—I, her brother, and Mr Headstone, the most competent authority, as his certificates would easily prove, that could be produced—she is wilfully and willingly profiting by other schemes. Ay, and taking pains, too, for I know what such pains are. And so does Mr Headstone! Well! Somebody pays for this, is a thought that naturally occurs to us; who pays? We apply ourselves to find out, Mr Lightwood, and we find that your friend, this Mr Eugene Wrayburn, here, pays. Then I ask him what right has he to do it, and what does he mean by it, and how comes he to be taking such a liberty without my consent, when I am raising myself in the scale of society by my own exertions and Mr Headstone's aid, and have no right to have any darkness cast upon my prospects, or any imputation upon my respectability, through my sister? . . .

“Now I tell Mr Eugene Wrayburn that I object to his having any acquaintance at all with my sister, and that I request him to drop it altogether. He is not to take it into his head that I am afraid of my sister's caring for *him*, but I object to it, and that's enough. I am more important to my sister than he thinks. As I raise myself, I intend to raise her; she knows that, and she has to look to me for her prospects. Now I understand all this very well, and so does Mr Headstone. My sister is an excellent girl, but she has some romantic notions; not about such things as your Mr Eugene Wrayburn's, but about the death of my father and other matters of that sort. Mr Wrayburn encourages those notions to make himself of importance, and so she thinks she ought to be grateful to him, and perhaps even likes to be. Now I don't choose her to be grateful to him, or to be grateful to anybody but me, except Mr Headstone. And I tell Mr Wrayburn that if he don't take heed of what I say, it will be worse for her. Let him turn that over in his memory, and make sure of it. Worse for her!”

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A COWARDLY STAB.

During this long harangue Wrayburn is regarding Headstone with such complacent imperturbability that the schoolmaster is driven well-nigh mad, and clutches at his respectable watch-guard as though he would fain tear it off and wind it round Wrayburn's throat till it strangles him.

After the boy—whose intervention on behalf of his sister, though based on the low grounds of his own selfish interests, is perfectly natural and proper, and should have so appealed to the instincts of a gentleman—had finished and left the room, Headstone remains to have a few words with Wrayburn. It is an unequal contest—the quick-witted barrister against the slow-witted schoolmaster. Eugene knows his advantage and uses it with calculated cruelty. This is a sample :

"When I accompanied that youth here, sir, I did so with the purpose of adding, as a man whom you should not be permitted to put aside, in case you put him aside as a boy, that his instinct is correct and right." Thus Bradley Headstone, with great effort and difficulty.

"Is *that* all?" asked Eugene.

"No, sir," said the other, flushed and fierce. "I strongly support him in his disapproval of your visits to his sister, and in his objection to your officiousness—and worse—in what you have taken upon yourself to do for her."

"Is *that* all?" asked Eugene.

"No, sir. I determined to tell you that you are not justified in these proceedings, and that they are injurious to his sister."

"Are you her schoolmaster as well as her brother's?—Or perhaps you would like to be?" said Eugene.

It was a stab that the blood followed, in its rush to Bradley Headstone's face, as swiftly as if it had been dealt with a dagger.

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More than a "stab"—it was a cowardly hit below the belt; and I wish that Headstone had forgotten his respectability, and, remembering only his manhood, given Wrayburn a real blow in return, whatever the consequences.

The schoolmaster follows his pupil. After a little awkward silence, Mortimer questions "his friend":

"Eugene, do you design to capture and desert this girl?"

"My dear fellow, no."

"Do you design to marry her?"

"My dear fellow, no."

"Do you design to pursue her?"

"My dear fellow, I don't design anything. I have no design whatever. I am incapable of designs. If I conceived a design, I should speedily abandon it, exhausted by the operation."

"Oh, Eugene, Eugene!"

And oh, again, Eugene! You are treading a dangerously slippery path; and to-night you have kindled such fires of raging hatred as blood alone will quench.

A SCHOOLMASTER'S LOVE.

Headstone is in love with Lizzie—overwhelmingly in love—appallingly in love; and as strong as his love is for her—so strong is his hatred of Wrayburn. The knowledge that the latter has successfully forestalled him in the education scheme is gall and wormwood to him, and he determines to visit Lizzie alone and make appeal to her. When I read of his state of mind during that walk—when I read the interview with Lizzie, I can find in my heart nothing but pity for this victim of a hopeless passion.

He walked with a bent head hammering at one fixed idea. It had been an immovable idea since he first set eyes upon her. It seemed to him as if all that he could

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suppress in himself he had suppressed, as if all that he could restrain in himself he had restrained, and the time had come—in a rush, in a moment—when the power of self-command had departed from him. Love at first sight is a trite expression quite sufficiently discussed; enough that in certain smouldering natures like this man's, that passion leaps into a blaze, and makes such head as fire does in a rage of wind, when other passions, but for its mastery, could be held in chains. As a multitude of weak, imitative natures are always lying by, ready to go mad upon the next wrong idea that may be broached, so these less ordinary natures may lie by for years, ready on the touch of an instant to burst into flame.

The schoolmaster went his way, brooding and brooding, and a sense of being vanquished in a struggle might have been pieced out of his worried face. Truly, in his breast there lingered a resentful shame to find himself defeated by this passion for Charley Hexam's sister, though in the very self-same moments he was concentrating himself upon the object of bringing the passion to a successful issue.

His intervention is a failure. If Lizzie is anything more than anything else, she is loyal. She is quite satisfied with the teacher supplied by Eugene and has no intention of changing.

With the fatuity of the desperately hopeless, Headstone will not take "no" for an answer. He urges that there is a personal relation concerned in the matter which he must deal with at another interview. Will she grant him another interview "before the whole case can be submitted."

"What case, Mr Headstone? What is wanting to it?"

"You—you shall be informed in the other interview." Then he said, as if in a burst of irrepressible despair, "I—I leave it all incomplete! There is a spell upon me, I think!" And then added, almost as if he asked for pity, "Good-night!"

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Poor, wretched creature. He knows his case is hopeless. He has yet one card to play—the brother; and the worst in the pack, if he only knew it. Lizzie is one of those grand women to whom personal honour is the dearest thing she possesses. She will work, starve, die even, to do her brother a good turn—but she will not sell, or give, her soul for him.

That night to amuse the doll's dressmaker she sees a picture in the fire—in the hollow down by the flare. She sees herself rich and handsome (as Jenny Wren wants it that way) and the picture in the fire thus reveals itself :

"She is glad, glad to be rich, that he may have the money. She is glad, glad to be beautiful, that he may be proud of her. Her poor heart——"

"Eh? Her poor heart?" said Miss Wren.

"Her heart—is given him, with all its love and truth. She would joyfully die with him, or, better than that, die for him. She knows he has failings, but she thinks they have grown up through his being like one cast away, for the want of something to trust in, and care for, and think well of. And she says, that lady rich and beautiful that I can never come near, 'Only put me in that empty place, only try how little I mind myself, only prove what a world of things I will do and bear for you, and I hope that you might even come to be much better than you are, through me who am so much worse, and hardly worth the thinking of beside you.'"

Miserable, tortured Headstone! With such a girl as this, with such devoted love as this for your rival, what chance have you, with fifty brothers to support you?

SUBMITTING THE WHOLE CASE.

Clutching desperately at the straw of this stipulated interview, Headstone and Charley set out one evening to the City, Leadenhall Street-wards, to meet Lizzie as she leaves busi-

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ness. On their way thither Charley with boyish egotism encourages the schoolmaster (who has confided his hopes to him) by saying: "We have everything on our side." To which Headstone *thinks* in reply, "Except your sister, perhaps."

Soon Lizzie comes along and her brother leads her into a paved square court—an old churchyard—so that they may talk in quiet. Here Charley, in the character of benevolent brother, says:

"Lizzie, Mr Headstone has something to say to you. I don't wish to be an interruption either to him or to you, and so I'll go and take a little stroll and come back. I know in a general way what Mr Headstone intends to say, and I very highly approve of it, as I hope—and indeed I do not doubt—you will. I needn't tell you, Lizzie, that I am under great obligations to Mr Headstone, and that I am very anxious for Mr Headstone to succeed in all he undertakes. As I hope—and as, indeed, I don't doubt—you must be."

No use for Lizzie to protest that Mr Headstone had better not say it. Strong in his belief in his sister's loyalty to him at any cost, he leaves them.

How does the schoolmaster begin his declaration of love? "You are the ruin of me." Was ever maid so wooed?

"Yes! you are the ruin—the ruin—the ruin—of me. I have no resources in myself, I have no confidence in myself, I have no government of myself when you are near me or in my thoughts. And you are always in my thoughts now. I have never been quit of you since I first saw you. Oh, that was a wretched day for me! That was a wretched, miserable day!"

His love-making is terrible—terrifying in its absolute abandonment.

"You know what I am going to say. I love you. What

other men may mean when they use that expression, I cannot tell; what *I* mean is, that I am under the influence of some tremendous attraction which I have resisted in vain, and which overmasters me. You could draw me to fire, you could draw me to water, you could draw me to the gallows, you could draw me to any death, you could draw me to anything I have most avoided, you could draw me to any exposure and disgrace. This and the confusion of my thoughts, so that I am fit for nothing, is what I mean by your being the ruin of me. But if you would return a favourable answer to my offer of myself in marriage, you could draw me to any good—every good—with equal force. My circumstances are quite easy, and you would want for nothing. My reputation stands quite high, and would be a shield for yours. If you saw me at my work, able to do it well and respected in it, you might even come to take a sort of pride in me:—I would try hard that you should. Whatever considerations I may have thought of against this offer, I have conquered, and I make it with all my heart. Your brother favours me to the utmost, and it is likely that we might live and work together; anyhow, it is certain that he would have my best influence and support. I don't know that I could say more if I tried. I might only weaken what is ill enough said as it is. I only add that if it is any claim on you to be in earnest, I am in thorough earnest, dreadful earnest."

The answer, gently, kindly, but firmly given, is "No"—without hope or palliation.

"Then," says Headstone, bringing his clenched hand down upon the stone coping of the churchyard with a force that laid the knuckles raw and bleeding, "I hope that I may never kill him."

"Him," of course, is Eugene Wrayburn. Several times he mentions that name, accompanied by no word of threat, but uttered in such a tone of voice that conveys a worse threat than any words could convey.

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AN EGOTISTICAL BROTHER.

He has "stated his case" and has lost. When Charley saunters into view he says he must walk home by himself, and asks for half-an-hour's start. As if the poor girl has not been pestered enough by the schoolmaster, the pupil must needs start. Finding her obdurate to his arguments and blandishments, he assumes a violent tone :

"I know what this means, and you shall not disgrace me. It means your precious Mr Wrayburn; that's what it means."

"Charley! If you remember any old days of ours together, forbear!"

"But you shall not disgrace me," doggedly pursued the boy. "I am determined that after I have climbed up out of the mire, you shall not pull me down. You can't disgrace me if I have nothing to do with you, and I *will* have nothing to do with you for the future."

"Charley! On many a night like this, and many a worse night, I have sat on the stones of the street, hushing you in my arms. Unsay those words without even saying you are sorry for them, and my arms are open to you still, and so is my heart."

"I'll not unsay them. I'll say them again. You are an inveterately bad girl, and a false sister, and I have done with you. For ever, I have done with you!"

He threw up his ungrateful and ungracious hand as if it set up a barrier between them, and flung himself upon his heel and left her. She remained impassive on the same spot, silent and motionless, until the striking of the church clock roused her, and she turned away. But then, with the breaking up of her immobility came the breaking up of the waters that the cold heart of the selfish boy had frozen. And "Oh, that I were lying here with the dead!" and "Oh, Charley, Charley, that this should be the end of our pictures in the fire!" were all the words

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she said, as she laid her face in her hands on the stone coping.

It is quite in accordance with the nature of things as they happen in every-day life that at this particular moment of deep distress the one person happens along, who of all others should not have happened along—Eugene, who insists on accompanying Lizzie home.

He knew his power over her. He knew that she would not insist upon his leaving her. He knew that, her fears for him being aroused, she would be uneasy if he were out of her sight. For all his seeming levity and carelessness, he knew whatever he chose to know of the thoughts of her heart.

And going on at her side, so gaily, regardless of all that had been urged against him; so superior in his sallies and self-possession to the gloomy constraint of her suitor, and the selfish petulance of her brother; so faithful to her, as it seemed, when her own stock was faithless; what an immense advantage, what an overpowering influence were his that night! Add to the rest, poor girl, that she had heard him vilified for her sake, and that she had suffered for his, and where the wonder that his occasional tones of serious interest (setting off his carelessness, as if it were assumed to calm her), that his lightest touch, his lightest look, his very presence beside her in the dark common street, were like glimpses of an enchanted world, which it was natural for jealousy and malice and all meanness to be unable to bear the brightness of, and to gird at as bad spirits might.

Headstone has stated his case and lost. Eugene has stated no case and won. Won so much more than he knows, that she flees from him and is lost to him for many months to come.

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JEALOUSY'S HARVEST.

Lizzie's disappearance causes Eugene much uneasiness, and by fair means or foul he determines to find her hiding-place. Foul means—perhaps the foulest he could have chosen—offer and he accepts them.

Jenny Wren, Lizzie's friend, the deformed precocious doll's dressmaker, still only a child, has a father whose one passion is rum and who is nearly always in a more or less advanced state of intoxication. He it is who offers Lizzie's address to Eugene for—he has only one method of calculation—sixty threepenn'orths of rum; and in a short space of time Eugene is sculling up river en route for Lizzie's hiding-place.

From the moment that Lizzie has gone away, Eugene has been haunted by Headstone; the schoolmaster being under the delusion that he has her somewhere in his keeping. And he is following now in this up-river excursion—disguised as a bargeman. From the moment that Lizzie has said her decided "No" to his suit, there has been one thought that obsesses him to the exclusion of nearly all others—the murder of Eugene. Now he will feast his eyes on the sight of seeing them together, just to nerve and strengthen his arm; and then—no more Eugene.

That is in keeping with a favourite theory of Dickens's—that the struggles of great criminals are never *away* from, but always *towards* the crime they are contemplating. Headstone will be positively disappointed if he does not see Lizzie and Eugene together—that is to be the incentive—doubtless his poor tortured soul puts it as the reason—for the murder he is so carefully planning—so carefully that he has disguised himself to look like the keeper of the lock near to the village in which Lizzie is staying—Rogue Riderhood, who is known to have a bitter grudge against Eugene.

Eugene meets Lizzie in a newly mown meadow by the riverside. There is a hayrick in the meadow—and if he has the curiosity to look behind it he will see a bargeman lying

on his face. What would there have been in that to arouse his suspicions?

And if Headstone could only have overheard their conversation he might have been spared the commission of a great crime—got back into his old stride—and died at a respectable and respected old age, as he had lived a respectable and respected young man. The sadness of the might-have-been!

The conversation is not soothing to Eugene's *amour propre*.

"Can you imagine why I left London, Mr Wrayburn?"

"I am afraid, Lizzie," he openly answered, "that you left London to get rid of me. It is not flattering to my self-love, but I am afraid you did."

"I did."

"How could you be so cruel?"

"Oh, Mr Wrayburn," she answered, suddenly breaking into tears, "is it cruelty on my side? Oh, Mr Wrayburn, Mr Wrayburn, is there no cruelty on your being here to-night?" . . .

"Think of me, as belonging to another station, and quite cut off from you in honour. Remember that I have no protector near me, unless I have one in your noble heart. Respect my good name. If you feel towards me, in one particular, as you might if I was a lady, give me the full claims of a lady upon your generous behaviour. I am removed from you and your family by being a working girl. How true a gentleman to be as considerate of me as if I was removed by being a Queen!"

And now Eugene realises the utter hopelessness of his pursuit.

"I beseech you, Mr Wrayburn, I beg and pray you, leave this neighbourhood. If you do not, consider to what you will drive me."

He did consider within himself for a moment or two,

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and then retorted, "Drive you? To what shall I drive you, Lizzie?"

"You will drive me away. I live here peacefully and respected, and I am well employed here. You will force me to quit this place as I quitted London, and—by following me again—will force me to quit the next place in which I may find refuge, as I quitted this."

"Are you so determined, Lizzie—forgive the word I am going to use, for its literal truth—to fly from a lover?"

"I am so determined," she answered resolutely, though trembling, "to fly from such a lover."

Eugene asks whether there is no thought for him.

"I never supposed until to-night that you needed to be thought for. But if you do need to be; if you do truly feel at heart that you have indeed been towards me what you have called yourself to-night, and that there is nothing for us in this life but separation; then Heaven help you, and Heaven bless you!"

The purity with which in these words she expressed something of her own love and her own suffering, made a deep impression on him for the passing time. He held her, almost as if she were sanctified to him by death, and kissed her, once, almost as he might have kissed the dead.

So with a promise to leave the neighbourhood in the morning, and a quiet hand-shake, they parted; and Eugene goes for a reflective stroll by the riverside—furtively wiping away a tear as he went.

Walking along he turns suddenly and meets a man so close upon him that to avoid a collision he steps back. The man carries something over his shoulder which might be a broken oar, or spar, or bar, and takes no notice of Eugene.

He continues his walk deep in meditation.

The rippling of the river seemed to cause a correspondent stir in his uneasy reflections. He would have laid them

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asleep if he could, but they were in movement, like the stream, and all tending one way with a strong current. As the ripple under the moon broke unexpectedly now and then, and palely flashed in a new shape and with a new sound, so parts of his thoughts started, unbidden, from the rest, and revealed their wickedness. "Out of the question to marry her," said Eugene, "and out of the question to leave her. The crisis!"

He had sauntered far enough. Before turning to retrace his steps, he stopped upon the margin, to look down at the reflected night. In an instant, with a dreadful crash, the reflected night turned crooked, flames shot jaggedly across the air, and the moon and stars came bursting from the sky.

Was he struck by lightning? With some incoherent half-formed thought to that effect, he turned under the blows that were blinding him and mashing his life, and closed with a murderer, whom he caught by a red neckerchief—unless the raining down of his own blood gave it that hue.

Eugene was light, active, and expert; but his arms were broken, or he was paralysed, and could do no more than hang on to the man, with his head swung back, so that he could see nothing but the heaving sky. After dragging at the assailant, he fell on the bank with him, and then there was another great crash, and then a splash, and all was done.

IS THIS DEATH?

Lizzie, too, has taken a stroll on the quiet banks and is turning homeward somewhat comforted when she hears a strange sound.

It startled her, for it was like a sound of blows. She stood still and listened. It sickened her, for blows fell heavily and cruelly on the quiet of the night. As she listened, undecided, all was silent. As she yet listened, she heard a faint groan, and a fall into the river.

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Her old bold life and habit instantly inspired her. Without vain haste of breath in crying for help where there were none to hear, she ran towards the spot from which the sounds had come. It lay between her and the bridge, but it was more removed from her than she had thought; the night being so very quiet, and sound travelling far with the help of water.

At length, she reached a part of the green bank, much and newly trodden, where there lay some broken splintered pieces of wood and some torn fragments of clothes. Stooping, she saw that the grass was bloody. Following the drops and smears, she saw that the watery margin of the bank was bloody. Following the current with her eyes, she saw a bloody face turned up towards the moon, and drifting away.

Now, merciful Heaven be thanked for that old time, and grant, O Blessed Lord, that through thy wonderful workings it may turn to good at last! To whomsoever the drifting face belongs, be it man's or woman's, help my humble hands, Lord God, to raise it from death and restore it to some one to whom it must be dear!

It was thought, fervently thought, but not for a moment did the prayer check her. She was away before it welled up in her mind, away, swift and true, yet steady above all, to the landing-place under the willow-tree, where she also had seen the boat lying moored among the stakes.

A sure touch of her old practised hand, a sure step of her old practised foot, a sure light balance of her body, and she was in the boat. A quick glance of her practised eyes showed her, even through the deep dark shadow, the skulls in a rack against the red-brick garden-wall. Another moment, and she had cast off (taking the line with her), and the boat had shot out into the moonlight, and she was rowing down the stream as never other woman rowed on English water.

Intently over her shoulder, without slackening speed, she looked ahead for the driving face. An untrained

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sight would never have seen by the moonlight what she saw at the length of a few strokes astern. She saw the drowning figure rise to the surface, slightly struggle, and as if by instinct turn over on its back to float. Just so had she first dimly seen the face which she now dimly saw again.

Firm of look and firm of purpose, she intently watched its coming on, until it was very near; then, with a touch unshipped her sculls, and crept aft in the boat, between kneeling and crouching. Once, she let the body evade her, not being sure of her grasp. Twice, and she had seized it by its bloody hair.

It was insensible, if not virtually dead; it was mutilated, and streaked the water all about it with dark red streaks. As it could not help itself, it was impossible for her to get it on board. She bent over the stern to secure it with the line, and then the river and its shores rang to the terrible cry she uttered.

But, as if possessed by supernatural spirit and strength, she lashed it safe, resumed her seat, and rowed in, desperately, for the nearest shallow water where she might run the boat aground. Desperately, but not wildly, for she knew that if she lost distinctness of intention, all was lost and gone.

She ran the boat ashore, went into the water, released him from the line, and by main strength lifted him in her arms and laid him in the bottom of the boat. He had fearful wounds upon him, and she bound them up with her dress torn into strips. Else, supposing him to be still alive, she foresaw that he must bleed to death before he could be landed at his inn, which was the nearest place for succour. This done very rapidly, she kissed his disfigured forehead, looked up in anguish to the stars, and blessed him and forgave him, "if she had anything to forgive." It was only in that instant that she thought of herself, and then she thought of herself only for him.

She rowed hard—rowed desperately, but never wildly—and seldom removed her eyes from him in the bottom

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of the boat. She had so laid him there, as that she might see his disfigured face; it was so much disfigured that his mother might have covered it, but it was above and beyond disfigurement in her eyes.

The boat touched the edge of the patch of inn lawn, slopping gently to the water. There were lights in the windows, but there chanced to be no one out of doors. She made the boat fast, and again by main strength took him up, and never laid him down until she laid him down in the house.

Surgeons were sent for, and she sat supporting his head. She had oftentimes heard in days that were gone, how doctors would lift the hand of an insensible wounded person, and would drop it if the person were dead. She waited for the awful moment when the doctors might lift this hand, all broken and bruised, and let it fall.

The first of the surgeons came, and asked, before proceeding to his examination, "Who brought him in?"

"I brought him in, sir," answered Lizzie, at whom all present looked.

"You, my dear? You could not lift, far less carry, this weight."

"I think I could not, at another time, sir; but I am sure I did."

The surgeon looked at her with great attention, and with some compassion. Having with a grave face touched the wounds upon the head, and the broken arms, he took the hand.

Oh! would he let it drop?

He appeared irresolute. He did not retain it, but laid it gently down, took a candle, looked more closely at the injuries on the head, and at the pupils of the eyes. That done, he replaced the candle and took the hand again. Another surgeon then coming in, the two exchanged a whisper, and the second took the hand. Neither did he let it fall at once, but kept it for a while and laid it gently down.

"Attend to the poor girl," said the first surgeon then.

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"She is quite unconscious. She sees nothing and hears nothing. All the better for her! Don't rouse her, if you can help it; only move her. Poor girl, poor girl! She must be amazingly strong of heart, but it is much to be feared that she has set her heart upon the dead. Be gentle with her."

A WORD WANTED.

Up to now, little Jenny Wren, the Doll's Dressmaker, seems to have been one of those fascinating characters that spring spontaneously from Dickens's brain—of engrossing interest, yet having little to do with the material development of the story. True she has made the egregious Fledgeby smart with vinegar and pepper on the "Lammle" cuts and bruises, and Lizzie has lived with her—but so far nothing more. Now she is to become a person of real importance whose fantastic fancy finds the one word for which Eugene's battered and benumbed brain is so vainly seeking—and brings about one of the most pathetic and romantic scenes in the story.

Both Jenny and Lizzie are mystics. Lizzie sees pictures in the "hollow down by the flare" of the fire. Jenny, the disfigured hunchback, with her crutch (which she playfully calls her "fairy coach"), persecuted, pelted and called names by the thoughtless children of her locality, consoles herself by having visions of fanciful children—beautiful beings which come to her in bright slanting rows, bringing with them the smell of beautiful flowers, and soothing her pain. These visions she has once told to Eugene, who, on what is apparently his death-bed, wants to see the bright, courageous, precocious little thing. It is Mortimer Lightwood who brings the message.

"My dear friend, Mr Eugene Wrayburn, is dying."

The dressmaker clasped her hands, and uttered a little piteous cry.

"Is dying," repeated Lightwood, with emotion, "at some distance from here. He is sinking under injuries

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received at the hands of a villain who attacked him in the dark. I come straight from his bedside. He is almost always insensible. In a short restless interval of sensibility, or partial sensibility, I made out that he asked for you to be brought to sit by him. Hardly relying on my own interpretation of the indistinct sounds he made, I caused Lizzie to hear them. We were both sure that he asked for you. . . . If you delay, he may die with his request ungratified, with his last wish—intrusted to me—we have long been much more than brothers—unfulfilled. I shall break down, if I try to say more."

In a few moments the black bonnet and the crutch-stick were on duty, the good Jew was left in possession of the house, and the doll's dressmaker, side by side in a chaise with Mortimer Lightwood, was posting out of town.

She has been seated by his bedside four days before he comes out of one of those long periods of utter unconsciousness and speaks to her, and then it is to ask her if she has smelled the flowers and seen the children recently.

Strange that so casual and careless a man, at such a moment, should be pleased with such a fancy! "I should like you to have the fancy here before I die," he adds.

He remains conscious enough this time to extract from Mortimer the promise that the perpetrator of the assault shall never be brought to justice—for the sake of Lizzie's reputation.

"Dear Mortimer, the man must never be pursued. If he should be accused, you must keep him silent and save him. Don't think of avenging me; think only of hushing the story and protecting her. You can confuse the case, and turn aside the circumstances. Listen to what I say to you. It was not the schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone. Do you hear me? Twice; it was not the schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone. Do you hear me? Three times; it was not the schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone."

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Time after time he lapses into insensibility—repeating one word “millions of times—Lizzie, Lizzie, Lizzie”!

THE WORD FOUND—AND A WIFE.

Then it is that Jenny discovers the word for which he is struggling so hard. She whispers it to Mortimer.

“Don’t speak, Eugene. Do no more than look at me, and listen to me. You follow what I say?”

He moved his head in assent.

“I am going on from the point where we broke off. Is the word we should soon have to come to—is it—Wife?”

“Oh, God bless you, Mortimer!”

“Hush! don’t be agitated. Don’t speak. Hear me, dear Eugene. Your mind will be more at peace, lying here, if you make Lizzie your wife. You wish me to speak to her, and tell her so, and entreat her to be your wife. You ask her to kneel at this bedside and be married to you, that your reparation may be complete. Is that so?”

“Yes. God bless you! Yes.”

The ceremony is performed by Mr Milvey—clergyman of a parish near to Headstone’s School—and a dispenser of some of Mr Boffin’s bounty. Bella Wilfer (now Mrs “Rokesmith”) is also present at the bedside.

Then they all stood around the bed, and Mr Milvey, opening his book, began the service; so rarely associated with the shadow of death; so inseparable in the mind from a flush of life and gaiety and hope and health and joy. Bella thought how different from her own sunny little wedding, and wept. Mrs Milvey overflowed with pity, and wept too. The dolls’ dressmaker, with her hands before her face, wept in her golden bower. Reading in a low clear voice, and bending over Eugene, who

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kept his eyes upon him, Mr Milvey did his office with suitable simplicity. As the bridegroom could not move his hand, they touched his fingers with the ring, and so put it on the bride. When the two plighted their troth, she laid her hand on his, and kept it there. When the ceremony was done, and all the rest departed from the room, she drew her arm under his head, and laid her own head down upon the pillow by his side.

"Undraw the curtains, my dear girl," said Eugene, after a while, "and let us see our wedding-day."

The sun was rising, and his first rays struck into the room as she came back and put her lips to his. "I bless the day!" said Eugene. "I bless the day!" said Lizzie.

By God's infinite mercy he lives—lives to bless that day of days every day; lives to realise the truth of Mortimer's words:

"And I solemnly believe, with all my soul, that if Providence should mercifully restore you to us, you will be blessed with a noble wife in the preserver of your life, whom you will dearly love."

A beautiful character is Lizzie. Strong and resolute of will and purpose, perfectly pure in heart, she rises superior to her early surroundings and associations and becomes one of nature's true noble women. It is to be hoped that Eugene in the midst of his great happiness gives more than an occasional passing thought to the miserable murderer and suicide, Bradley Headstone, whose sin-stained soul he has so wantonly tortured—and to whose savage assault he owes the possession of his beautiful wife.

XII

BETSY TROTWOOD. (From *David Copperfield*)

EXPLANATION OF CHARACTERS MENTIONED IN THIS SKETCH.

Babley, Richard—Simple-minded protégé of Betsy Trotwood's, known as "Mr Dick."

Barkis—Carrier, who marries Clara Peggotty.

Chillip—The doctor who assists in bringing David into the world.

Copperfield, Mrs Clara—Mother of David and subsequently wife of Mr Murdstone.

Copperfield, David—Her son.

Copperfield, Dora—David's first wife (*née* Spenlow).

Copperfield, Agnes—David's second wife (*née* Wickfield).

Dartle, Rosa—Companion to Mrs Steerforth.

Emily (Little)—Niece to Peggotty.

Gummidge, Mrs—Widow of one of Peggotty's mates; inmate of his home.

Heep, Uriah—Clerk to, and afterwards partner of, Mr Wickfield; he is the apostle of 'umbleness.

Janet—Maid to Betsy Trotwood.

Littimer—Valet to Steerforth.

Micawber, Wilkins—"Friend of David's youth"; an apostle of optimism.

Murdstone, Edward—David's stepfather; the apostle of
"firmness."

Murdstone, Janet—His admiring sister.

Peggotty, Clara—Nurse to David's mother; sister to Dan
Peggotty; afterwards Mrs Barkis.

Peggotty, Dan—Uncle to Little Emily; a fisherman.

Spenlow, Francis—Father of Dora and member of the firm
of Spenlow & Jorkins.

Steerforth, James—Schoolmate of David's and seducer of
Little Emily.

Traddles, Thomas—Schoolmate of David's; afterwards
barrister and judge.

Trotwood, Betsy—Great-aunt to David Copperfield, and his
benefactress.

Wickfield—Solicitor of Canterbury.

BETSY TROTWOOD.

David Copperfield was published in 1849 and 1850, in monthly parts; eight in 1849 and twelve in 1850. Dickens seems to have had some difficulty in finding a satisfactory title; his fancy ranging from *Mag's Diversions*, being the personal history of Mr Thomas Mag the Younger of Blunderstone House; *The Copperfield Disclosures*; *The Copperfield Records*; *The Last Living Speech and Confession of David Copperfield, Junior*; *The Copperfield Survey of the World as it Rolled*; *The Last Will and Testament of Mr David Copperfield*; *Copperfield Complete*; to *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery*—which he never meant to be published on any account; finally choosing *The Personal History of David Copperfield*, now boiled down to *David Copperfield*.

This is a work which makes a special appeal to the Dickens lover. It was Dickens's favourite work; and of it he pathetically says:

"Of all my books I like this the best. It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy and that no one can ever love that family as truly as I love them; but, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child, and his name is David Copperfield."

The book has, however, a stronger claim to our regard in the fact that it is to some extent—perhaps a more limited extent than is generally imagined—autobiographical. Certainly chapters eleven and twelve of *David Copperfield* are almost an exact account of Dickens's young life; changing his degrading occupation at the wine cellars of Murdstone & Grinby to the degrading occupation in the blacking factory,

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and changing Mr and Mrs Micawber to his own father and mother. And certain subsequent portions of *David Copperfield*'s career, such as his learning shorthand, his Parliamentary reporting, his journalism, and his fame and prosperity as an author, are portions of the career of Dickens as well. But while it is autobiographical, it is by no means anything like an autobiography.

David Copperfield is a healthy story, replete with interest from cover to cover. While there is plenty of humour—the humour always plays a subsidiary part to the narrative.

From the first *David Copperfield* exercised an attraction—a fascination—over the minds of the reading public such as no other of Dickens's books exercised, save and except *Pickwick*. I fancy that if a *plebiscite* were taken as to the relative popularity of his works, these two would head the poll; but I hesitate to say which would be on top. Of *David Copperfield*, Thackeray wrote: "How beautiful it is, how charmingly fresh and simple! In these admirable touches of tender humour—and I should call humour a mixture of love and wit—who can equal this great genius? There are little words and phrases in his books which are like personal benefits to the reader." And even Matthew Arnold wrote: "A work so sound, a work so rich in merits. . . . What treasures of gaiety, invention, life, are in that book! What alertness of resource, what a soul accompanying and governing the whole." Bulwer Lytton, too, for whom Dickens ever had the greatest admiration, spoke of it in the highest terms.

I do not know whether it was a case of not being able to keep up the pressure, but to my mind the first half of *David Copperfield* is incomparably finer than the last half. This same trait of inequality is discernible in almost a similar degree in *A Tale of Two Cities*; only in that book the situation is reversed, the latter half being infinitely superior in every way to the first. If it were possible to unite the simple and touching humanity of the first part of *David Copperfield* to the grandeur of description, the majesty of thought, and the poetry of diction contained in the latter

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part of *A Tale of Two Cities* we should have the most perfect book ever written.

David Copperfield has altogether ninety-eight characters; and it is noteworthy that instead of the female characters being in the minority, they are on a par with the men—forty-nine of each sex. It has three heroes—Micawber, David and Peggotty; three heroines—Little Emily, Dora and Agnes; and four villains—Uriah Heep, James Steerforth, Murdstone and Littimer.

Of the men, Micawber is an easy first. Indeed he is one of Dickens's greatest creations. "One of—" I can hear some saying. "Why! he is far beyond any other." Quite so; but every man to his humour; and I have a preference for Dick Swiveller—mostly, I think, for the—perhaps unsatisfactory—reason that no attempt—so far as I know—has ever been made to liken him to any real person who ever walked this earth. He burst from one of the bubbles of Dickens's ink-pot on to the pages of *MS.* and at once walked the pages like a thing of life. To me it affords no satisfaction of any kind to know that any one of these exquisite fantasies are "drawn from real life." What matters it that Lawrence Boythorn (*Bleak House*) was Landon in real life, or that Harold Skimpole (*Bleak House*) was Leigh Hunt? True it is that Dickens himself admitted that Micawber was drawn from his own father and Mrs Nickleby from his own mother. But this was only done in self-defence after he had suffered some obloquy through making Harold Skimpole resemble Leigh Hunt a little too much. In this respect I cannot too sufficiently admire the philosophy of Uncle Remus. He was talking of "chitterlings." The little boy who was being entertained corrected him and said it was "chitlings." "Very well," said Uncle Remus. "You can hab de namin' on 'em ef you'll only let me hab de eatin' on 'em." Equally anyone can have the pleasure of finding real prototypes to these unique beings of an inexhaustible imagination, so long as they leave me the enjoyment of them as they are.

Micawber is a stupendous—bewildering—conception; yet

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one of the most lovable men ever limned. Micawber bestrides the pages of *David Copperfield* like a Colossus, and yet he is only a simple-minded man; always at hand-grips with sordid poverty; always having his ups-and-downs—mostly downs; always with the care of a too numerous family—but always blessed with that cheery, endearing optimism which he has crystallised into a phrase that has become part of our daily speech: "Waiting for something to turn up." Yet it was this unsophisticated soul that Dickens utilised for discovering the dirty machinations of Uriah Heep. How much longer of duration is the fanciful—the figment of the imagination—than the real! Micawber's original died peacefully, while Micawber himself was blossoming into immortality. The real with never a second thought given him by the world at large. The imaginary laughed at, laughed with, admired, loved and quoted by millions.

Of the other men, Peggotty is by far the most important. It does not require a great stretch of the imagination to realise that in all probability the family living in the old boat at Yarmouth were especial favourites of Dickens. Dickens was so at one with his characters that to him they were things of reality. Not at all difficult for him—writing as a man of thirty-seven—to realise what a little chap like David would think of such people—to visualise himself as that little chap—and in his own great manly heart to feel all the glow of gratitude that little David would feel to such homely and kindly hosts.

Of the women, Betsy Trotwood holds the field against all comers. I have not yet heard that she was like anybody—but I should not be surprised if some claimant from Broadstairs or Dover did not spring up. This eccentric lady—as perfect a piece of craftsmanship as ever author presented—does not grow before us and into us as some other characters do; she presents herself armed *cap-a-pie*; storm-tossed and battered by malignant adversity; an assumed abruptness to hide a really kind and tender heart; what though she be cross-grained; soured a little by her unhappy

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married experiences; she is the very soul of staunch loyalty, the embodiment of true and pure womanliness.

Dora is having a sketch to herself ("David's Dora"). Rosa Dartle is a storm-centre; whether she loves Steerforth with a love so keen that it is akin to hate; or whether she hates him with a hatred so intense that it is nearly allied to love, I cannot discover. Generally insinuating—asking questions which are statements and making statements that are questions—she is ordinarily an unsatisfactory conversationalist. There is one occasion, however, when she lets herself go with no doubting or uncertain voice, and that is when Little Emily returns after having been abandoned by Steerforth. Then the lady of innuendo and suggestion disappears and a first-rate shrew and virago takes her place.

As devoted daughter, loyal friend, loving wife, Agnes Wickfield will commend herself to many hearts. But I think I may have with me hundreds of other hearts who will agree that this angel-like girl, with the ever-shining eyes, this all-wise and sure-of-herself lady, would be likely to pall a little, after a time; and that poor little, undomesticated, bemuddled, loving, tender-hearted Dora is the more human of the two. Perhaps there will be no division of opinion on this point: that David was a lucky man to find two such brides.

Mrs Gummidge—the relict of a dead brother-fisherman of Peggotty's, to whom he gives a home—perpetual wet-blanket of the hut—always "a-thinkin' of the old 'un," always imagining that things go "contrairey" with her—is priceless. Her real worth is revealed by adversity. Then she shows what a comfort she can be to Peggotty—what a true woman-friend to Little Emily.

INTRODUCES BETSY TROTWOOD.

The subject of this sketch makes her appearance—with characteristic abruptness—in the first chapter of *David Copperfield*, which work, it will be remembered, is written in the first person.

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An aunt of my father's, and consequently a great-aunt of mine, of whom I shall have more to relate by and by, was the principal magnate of our family. Miss Trotwood, or Miss Betsey, as my poor mother always called her, when she sufficiently overcame her dread of this formidable personage to mention her at all (which was seldom), had been married to a husband younger than herself, who was very handsome, except in the sense of the homely adage, "handsome is, that handsome does"—for he was strongly suspected of having beaten Miss Betsey, and even of having once, on a disputed question of supplies, made some hasty but determined arrangements to throw her out of a two-pair of stairs' window. These evidences of an incompatibility of temper induced Miss Betsey to pay him off, and effect a separation by mutual consent. He went to India with his capital, and there, according to a wild legend in our family, he was once seen riding on an elephant, in company with a Baboon; but I think it must have been a Baboo—or a Begum. Anyhow, from India tidings of his death reached home, within ten years. How they affected my aunt, nobody knew; for immediately upon the separation she took her maiden name again, bought a cottage in a hamlet on the sea-coast a long way off, established herself there as a single woman with one servant, and was understood to live secluded, ever afterwards, in an inflexible retirement.

THE NAMING OF AN UNBORN CHILD.

On the day that David is born, his mother is surprised to see a strange lady coming up the garden.

My mother had a sure foreboding at the second glance, that it was Miss Betsey. The setting sun was glowing on the strange lady, over the garden-fence, and she came walking up to the door with a fell rigidity of figure and composure of countenance that could have belonged to nobody else.

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When she reached the house, she gave another proof of her identity. My father had often hinted that she seldom conducted herself like any ordinary Christian; and now, instead of ringing the bell, she came and looked in at that identical window, pressing the end of her nose against the glass to that extent that my poor dear mother used to say it became perfectly flat and white in a moment.

She gave my mother such a turn, that I have always been convinced I am indebted to Miss Betsey for having been born on a Friday.

My mother had left her chair in her agitation, and gone behind it in the corner. Miss Betsey, looking round the room, slowly and inquiringly, began on the other side, and carried her eyes on, like a Saracen's Head in a Dutch clock, until they reached my mother. Then she made a frown and a gesture to my mother, like one who was accustomed to be obeyed, to come and open the door. My mother went.

"Mrs David Copperfield, I *think*," said Miss Betsey; the emphasis referring, perhaps, to my mother's mourning weeds, and her condition.

"Yes," said my mother, faintly.

"Miss Trotwood," said the visitor. "You have heard of her, I dare say?"

My mother answered she had had that pleasure. And she had a disagreeable consciousness of not appearing to imply that it had been an overpowering pleasure.

"Now you see her," said Miss Betsey. My mother bent her head, and begged her to walk in.

The conversation naturally turns on the expected event :

"You were speaking about its being a girl," said Miss Betsey. "I have no doubt it will be a girl. I have a presentiment that it must be a girl. Now, child, from the moment of the birth of this girl——"

"Perhaps boy," my mother took the liberty of putting in.

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"I tell you I have a presentiment that it must be a girl," returned Miss Betsey. "Don't contradict. From the moment of this girl's birth, child, I intend to be her friend. I intend to be her godmother, and I beg you'll call her Betsy Trotwood Copperfield. There must be no mistakes in life with *this* Betsy Trotwood. There must be no trifling with *her* affections, poor dear. She must be well brought up, and well guarded from reposing any foolish confidences where they are not deserved. I must make that *my* care."

DR CHILLIP'S MISTAKE.

So truculent a looking lady as Miss Betsy Trotwood must have, as a counterbalance, a very meek doctor with whom to combat; and she has it in the person of Dr Chillip.

The doctor was the meekest of his sex, the mildest of little men. He sidled in and out of a room, to take up the less space. He walked as softly as the Ghost in Hamlet, and more slowly. He carried his head on one side, partly in modest depreciation of himself, partly in modest propitiation of everybody else. It is nothing to say that he hadn't a word to throw at a dog. He couldn't have *thrown* a word at a mad dog. He might have offered him one gently, or half a one, or a fragment of one; for he spoke as slowly as he walked; but he wouldn't have been rude to him, and he couldn't have been quick with him, for any earthly consideration.

The expected has happened; and David has made his appearance and the doctor goes to announce his advent to Miss Trotwood.

"Be calm, my dear ma'am," said Mr Chillip, in his softest accents. "There is no longer any occasion for uneasiness. Be calm."

It has since been considered almost a miracle that my

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aunt didn't shake him, and shake what he had to say out of him. She only shook her own head at him, but in a way that made him quail.

"Well, ma'am," resumed Mr Chillip, as soon as he had courage, "I am happy to congratulate you. All is now over, ma'am, and well over."

During the five minutes or so that Mr Chillip devoted to the delivery of this oration, my aunt eyed him narrowly.

"How is she??" said my aunt, folding her arms with her bonnet still tied on one of them.

"Well, ma'am, she will soon be quite comfortable, I hope," returned Mr Chillip. "Quite as comfortable as we can expect a young mother to be, under these melancholy domestic circumstances. There cannot be any objection to your seeing her presently, ma'am. It may do her good."

"And *she*. How is *she*? " said my aunt, sharply.

Mr Chillip laid his head a little more on one side, and looked at my aunt like an amiable bird.

"The baby," said my aunt. "How is she?"

"Ma'am," returned Mr Chillip, "I apprehended you had known. It's a boy."

My aunt said never a word, but took her bonnet by the strings, in the manner of a sling, aimed a blow at Mr Chillip's head with it, put it on bent, walked out, and never came back. She vanished like a discontented fairy; or like one of those superantural beings whom it was popularly supposed I was entitled to see; and never came back any more.

AN EDEN AND TWO SERPENTS.

Nursed in the snugly comfortable nest of Blunderstone Rookery by a tenderly loving mother and the quaintly-named, but devoted Clara Peggotty, David has a happy childhood. The quiet calm of his environment, the happy atmosphere of peace and rest that surrounds him is beautifully expressed in a few lines:

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There is nothing half so green that I know anywhere, as the grass of that churchyard; nothing half so shady as its trees; nothing half so quiet as its tombstones. The sheep are feeding there, when I kneel up, early in the morning, in my little bed in a closet within my mother's room, to look out at it; and I see the red light shining on the sun-dial, and think within myself, "Is the sun-dial glad, I wonder, that it can tell the time again?"

His was indeed an idyllic life—and the Rookery an Adamless Eden; soon alas! to be invaded by a pair of baleful serpents. The basilisk-like glance of Murdstone has fallen on the pretty young widow; and she, poor dear, falls an easy victim to his wiles and marries him; and soon the Rookery is the home of Murdstone and his sister (as loathsome as her brother) and no home for David. David, by a stern system of unnatural repression, is changed from a bright, happy child into a sullen, discontented lad; driven nearly mad by the injustice of Murdstone, he bites him and is sent away to school; where he learns of his mother's death—killed by the weight of the Murdstone method; and shortly after this event David is sent to the Murdstone & Grinby warehouse to wash, label, cork and seal wine bottles. It was a degrading occupation for a delicate, sensitive child, and the iron of it entered deeply into his soul.

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship. The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day by day what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written.

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AFTER MANY YEARS.

He determines to run away; and having ascertained from Peggotty that his aunt lives near Dover he decides to set out for that place at the end of the week. His condition on arriving at Betsy Trotwood's cottage, after walking the whole way—selling his jacket en route—was pitiable; shoes burst and broken; hat crushed and bent; shirt and trousers torn and stained; unkempt hair; face burnt brown by exposure and covered from head to foot with chalk and dust. So conscious was he of his condition that he was on the point of slinking off when—

. . . there came out of the house a lady with her handkerchief tied over her cap, and a pair of gardening gloves on her hands, wearing a gardening pocket like a toll-man's apron, and carrying a great knife. I knew her immediately to be Miss Betsey, for she came stalking out of the house exactly as my poor mother had so often described her stalking up our garden at Blunderstone Rookery.

"Go away!" said Miss Betsey, shaking her head, and making a distant chop in the air with her knife. "Go along! No boys here!"

I watched her, with my heart at my lips, as she marched to a corner of her garden, and stopped to dig up some little root there. Then, without a scrap of courage, but with a great deal of desperation, I went softly in and stood beside her, touching her with my finger.

"If you please, ma'am," I began.

She started and looked back.

"If you please, aunt."

"Eh?" exclaimed Miss Betsey, in a tone of amazement I have never heard approached.

"If you please, aunt, I am your nephew."

"Oh, Lord!" said my aunt. And sat flat down in the garden-path.

"I am David Copperfield, of Blunderstone, in Suffolk—

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where you came, on the night when I was born, and saw my dear mamma. I have been very unhappy since she died. I have been slighted, and taught nothing, and thrown upon myself, and put to work not fit for me. It made me run away to you. I was robbed at first setting out, and have walked all the way, and have never slept in a bed since I began the journey." Here my self-support gave way all at once; and with a movement of my hands, intended to show her my ragged state, and call it to witness that I had suffered something, I broke into a passion of crying, which I suppose had been pent up within me all the week.

MISS TROTWOOD AFTER MANY YEARS.

This was the impression that David had of his aunt as he then saw her :

My aunt was a tall, hard-featured lady, but by no means ill-looking. There was an inflexibility in her face, in her voice, in her gait and carriage, amply sufficient to account for the effect she had made upon a gentle creature like my mother: but her features were rather handsome than otherwise, though unbending and austere. I particularly noticed that she had a very quick, bright eye. Her hair, which was grey, was fastened in two plain divisions, under what I believe would be called a mob-cap; I mean a cap, much more common then than now, with side-pieces fastening under the chin. Her dress was of a lavender colour, and perfectly neat; but scantily made, as if she desired to be as little encumbered as possible. I remember that I thought it, in form, more like a riding-habit with the superfluous skirt cut off, than anything else. She wore at her side a gentleman's gold watch, if I might judge from its size and make, with an appropriate chain and seals; she had some linen at her throat not unlike a shirt-collar, and things at her wrists like little shirt-wristbands.

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There was a patch of green outside the cottage which Betsy Trotwood considered her inviolable property; and over which she would permit no donkeys to ride.

AUNT, AND MR DICK.

No account of Miss Betsy Trotwood would be complete without a more than passing reference to Mr Dick.

Mr Dick—real name Mr Richard Babley—was a florid, pleasant-looking gentleman, with a grey head; who had much disconcerted David, while he was standing outside his aunt's cottage by looking out of a window at him, shutting one eye in a grotesque manner, nodding his head at times and at others shaking it. A few days after his arrival David asked his aunt if Mr Dick was not a little mad.

"Not a morsel," said my aunt.

"Oh, indeed!" I observed faintly.

"If there is anything in the world," said my aunt, with great decision and force of manner, "that Mr Dick is not, it's that."

I had nothing better to offer, than another timid "Oh, indeed!"

"He has been *called* mad," said my aunt. "I have a selfish pleasure in saying he has been called mad, or I should not have had the benefit of his society and advice for these last ten years and upwards—in fact, ever since your sister, Betsey Trotwood, disappointed me."

"So long as that?" I said.

"And nice people they were, who had the audacity to call him mad," pursued my aunt. "Mr Dick is a sort of distant connexion of mine; it doesn't matter how; I needn't enter into that. If it hadn't been for me, his own brother would have shut him up for life. That's all."

I am afraid it was hypocritical in me, but seeing that my aunt felt strongly on the subject, I tried to look as if I felt strongly too.

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"A proud fool!" said my aunt. "Because his brother was a little eccentric—though he is not half so eccentric as a good many people—he didn't like to have him visible about his house, and sent him away to some private asylum-place: though he had been left to his particular care by their deceased father, who thought him almost a natural. And a wise man *he* must have been to think so! Mad himself, no doubt."

Again, as my aunt looked quite convinced, I endeavoured to look quite convinced also.

"So I stepped in," said my aunt, "and made him an offer. I said, Your brother's sane—a great deal more sane than you are, or ever will be, it is to be hoped. Let him have his little income, and come and live with me. *I* am not afraid of him, *I* am not proud, *I* am ready to take care of him, and shall not ill-treat him as some people (besides the asylum-folks) have done. After a good deal of squabbling," said my aunt, "I got him; and he has been here ever since. He is the most friendly and amenable creature in existence; and as for advice!—But nobody knows what that man's mind is, except myself."

Goethe had said that the true way of treating the insane was, in all possible respects, to treat them as if they were sane, and Betsy Trotwood, probably without knowing a word about Goethe, adopted that sensible method, with eminent success, in her treatment of Mr Dick.

Mr Dick had two recreations; the one was writing a Memorial to Lord Somebody—out of which he vainly endeavoured to keep any allusion to King Charles's Head, and the other was flying a huge kite, which was made of paper covered in laborious writing, with facts about his case; his idea being that by flying his kite as high as possible he was diffusing his facts.

Miss Trotwood's reference to this kite was emphatic and characteristic.

"What of it? Franklin used to fly a kite. He was a

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Quaker or something of that sort, if I'm not mistaken. And a Quaker flying a kite is a much more ridiculous object than anybody else."

Thus the wise, sharp woman, elects to have for her constant companion, a man who is not quite "all there." Yet the conjunction is a happy one and ultimately works out for the benefit of others.

THE VANQUISHED MURDSTONE.

The next morning Miss Trotwood informs David that she has written to Mr Murdstone, and affords no comfort to David as to the possibilities attaching to his father-in-law's expected visit. He spends a few miserable days till a reply comes stating that Murdstone will be with them next day.

He duly arrives, accompanied by his sister, and David is fenced in in a corner near his aunt with a chair. Mr Dick, having been sent for and introduced as "an old and intimate friend, in whose judgment I rely," the proceedings are opened by Murdstone, who describes David as having "a sullen, rebellious spirit; a violent temper, and an untoward intractable disposition." He then formally offers to take David away with him, the consequences of refusal being that "my doors are shut against him henceforth."

"And what does the boy say?" said my aunt. "Are you ready to go, David?"

I answered no, and entreated her not to let me go. I said that neither Mr nor Miss Murdstone had ever liked me, or had ever been kind to me. That they had made my mamma, who always loved me dearly, unhappy about me, and that I knew it well, and that Peggotty knew it. I said that I had been more miserable than I thought anybody could believe who only knew how young I was. And I begged and prayed my aunt—I forget in what terms now, but I remember that they affected me very much then—to befriend and protect me, for my father's sake.

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Then does Betsy Trotwood turn her guns on the Murdstones and rakes them fore and aft.

"You can go when you like; I'll take my chance with the boy. If he's all you say he is, at least I can do as much for him then, as you have done. But I don't believe a word of it."

"Miss Trotwood," rejoined Mr Murdstone, shrugging his shoulders, as he rose, "if you were a gentleman——"

"Bah! Stuff and nonsense!" said my aunt. "Don't talk to me!"

"How exquisitely polite!" exclaimed Miss Murdstone, rising. "Overpowering, really!"

"Do you think I don't know," said my aunt, turning a deaf ear to the sister, and continuing to address the brother, and to shake her head at him with infinite expression, "what kind of life you must have led that poor, unhappy, misdirected baby? Do you think I don't know what a woeful day it was for the soft little creature when *you* first came in her way—smirking and making great eyes at her, I'll be bound, as if you couldn't say boh! to a goose!"

"I never heard anything so elegant!" said Miss Murdstone.

"Do you think I can't understand you as well as if I had seen you," pursued my aunt, "now that I *do* see and hear you—which I tell you candidly, is anything but a pleasure to me? Oh, yes, bless us! who so smooth and silky as Mr Murdstone at first! The poor, benighted innocent had never seen such a man. He was made of sweetness. He worshipped her. He doted on her boy—tenderly doted on him! He was to be another father to him, and they were all to live together in a garden of roses, weren't they? Ugh! Get along with you, do!" said my aunt.

"I never heard anything like this person in my life!" exclaimed Miss Murdstone.

"And when you had made sure of the poor little fool,"

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said my aunt—"God forgive me that I should call her so, and she gone where *you* won't go in a hurry—because you had not done wrong enough to her and hers, you must begin to train her, must you? begin to break her, like a poor caged bird, and wear her deluded life away, in teaching her to sing *your* notes?"

"This is either insanity or intoxication," said Miss Murdstone, in a perfect agony at not being able to turn the current of my aunt's address towards herself; "and my suspicion is that it's intoxication."

Miss Betsey, without taking the least notice of the interruption, continued to address herself to Mr Murdstone as if there had been no such thing.

"Mr Murdstone," she said, shaking her finger at him, "you were a tyrant to the simple baby, and you broke her heart. She was a loving baby—I know that; I knew it years before *you* ever saw her—and through the best part of her weakness you gave her the wounds she died of. There is the truth for your comfort, however you like it. And you and your instruments may make the most of it."

"Allow me to inquire, Miss Trotwood," interposed Miss Murdstone, "whom you are pleased to call, in a choice of words in which I am not experienced, my brother's instruments?"

Still stone-deaf to the voice, and utterly unmoved by it, Miss Betsey pursued her discourse.

"It was clear enough, as I have told you, years before *you* ever saw her—and why in the mysterious dispensations of Providence, you ever did see her, is more than humanity can comprehend—it was clear enough that the poor soft little thing would marry somebody, at some time or other; but I did hope it wouldn't have been as bad as it has turned out. That was the time, Mr Murdstone, when she gave birth to her boy here," said my aunt; "to the poor child you sometimes tormented her through afterwards, which is a disagreeable remembrance, and makes the sight of him odious now. Aye, aye! you

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needn't wince!" said my aunt. "I know it's true without that."

He had stood by the door, all this while, observant of her, with a smile upon his face, though his black eyebrows were heavily contracted. I remarked now, that, though the smile was on his face still, his colour had gone in a moment, and he seemed to breathe as if he had been running.

"Good day, sir," said my aunt, "and good bye! Good day to you, too, ma'am," said my aunt, turning suddenly upon his sister. "Let me see you ride a donkey over *my* green again, and as sure as you have a head upon your shoulders, I'll knock your bonnet off, and tread upon it!"

It would require a painter, and no common painter too, to depict my aunt's face as she delivered herself of this very unexpected sentiment, and Miss Murdstone's face as she heard it. But the manner of the speech, no less than the matter, was so fiery, that Miss Murdstone, without a word in answer, discreetly put her arm through her brother's, and walked haughtily out of the cottage; my aunt remaining in the window looking after them; prepared, I have no doubt, in case of the donkey's reappearance, to carry her threat into instant execution."

That! for the Murdstones, and all similar killjoys.

Betsy Trotwood places David at a school at Canterbury and arranges for a lodging at Mr Wickfield's—that gentleman being Miss Trotwood's solicitor. On leaving the boy, the aunt says:

"Never be mean in anything; never be false; never be cruel. Avoid these three vices and I can always be hopeful of you."

MISS TROTWOOD'S CLOUD.

The years pass and David leaves school. By the way, his aunt calls him "Trot," after the sister that should have been born, but never was. He travels to London by himself, meets Steerforth and takes him to Yarmouth—unhappy

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journey. On returning he finds his aunt in Town in Lincoln's Inn Fields; a private hotel with a stone staircase and a convenient roof; her firm conviction being that every house in London is destined to be burnt down every night.

It has been decided that David is to be articled to a Proctor, and the next day he and his aunt make their way to Doctors' Commons to see Mr Spenlow, of the firm of Spenlow & Jorkins—these being Miss Trotwood's Proctors; and this event occurred en route :

We made a pause at the toy-shop in Fleet-street, to see the giants of Saint Dunstan's strike upon the bells—we had timed our going, so as to catch them at it, at twelve o'clock—and then went on towards Ludgate Hill and St. Paul's Churchyard. We were crossing to the former place, when I found that my aunt greatly accelerated her speed, and looked frightened. I observed, at the same time, that a lowering ill-dressed man who had stopped and stared at us in passing, a little before, was coming so close after us, as to brush against her.

"Trot! My dear Trot!" cried my aunt, in a terrified whisper, and pressing my arm. "I don't know what I am to do."

"Don't be alarmed," said I. "There's nothing to be afraid of. Step into a shop, and I'll soon get rid of this fellow."

"No, no, child!" she returned. "Don't speak to him for the world. I entreat, I order you!"

"Good Heaven, aunt!" said I. "He is nothing but a sturdy beggar."

"You don't know what he is!" replied my aunt. "You don't know who he is? You don't know what you say!"

We had stopped in an empty doorway, while this was passing, and he had stopped too.

"Don't look at him!" said my aunt, as I turned my head indignantly, "but get me a coach, my dear, and wait for me in St. Paul's Churchyard."

"Wait for you?" I repeated.

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"Yes," rejoined my aunt. "I must go alone. I must go with him."

"With him, aunt? This man?"

"I am in my senses," she replied, "and I tell you I *must*. Get me a coach!"

However much astonished I might be, I was sensible that I had no right to refuse compliance with such a peremptory command. I hurried away a few paces, and called a hackney chariot which was passing empty. Almost before I could let down the steps, my aunt sprang in, I don't know how, and the man followed. She waved her hand to me to go away, so earnestly, that, all confounded as I was, I turned from them at once. In doing so, I heard her say to the coachman, "Drive anywhere! Drive straight on!" and presently the chariot passed me, going up the hill.

After half an hour's cooling in the churchyard, I saw the chariot coming back. The driver stopped beside me, and my aunt was sitting in it alone.

She had not yet sufficiently recovered from her agitation to be quite prepared for the visit we had to make. She desired me to get into the chariot, and to tell the coachman to drive slowly up and down a little while. She said no more, except, "My dear child, never ask me what it was, and don't refer to it," until she had perfectly regained her composure, when she told me she was quite herself now, and we might get out. On her giving me her purse, to pay the driver, I found that all the guineas were gone, and only the loose silver remained.

Some time after she tells David all about it.

"Trot," said my aunt, calmly, "it's my husband."

"Your husband, aunt? I thought he had been dead!"

"Dead to me," returned my aunt, "but living."

I sat in silent amazement.

"Betsy Trotwood don't look a likely subject for the tender passion," said my aunt, composedly, "but the time was, Trot, when she believed in that man most entirely."

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When she loved him, Trot, right well. When there was no proof of attachment and affection that she would not have given him. He repaid her by breaking her fortune, and nearly breaking her heart. So she put all that sort of sentiment, once and for ever, in a grave, filled it up, and flattened it down."

"My dear good aunt!"

"I left him," my aunt proceeded, laying her hand as usual on the back of mine, "generously. I may say at this distance of time, Trot, that I left him generously. He had been so cruel to me, that I might have effected a separation on easy terms for myself; but I did not. He soon made ducks and drakes of what I gave him, sank lower and lower, married another woman, I believe, became an adventurer, a gambler, and a cheat. What he is now, you see. But he was a fine-looking man when I married him," said my aunt, with an echo of her old pride and admiration in her tone; "and I believed him—I was a fool!—to be the soul of honour!"

She gave my hand a squeeze, and shook her head.

"He is nothing to me now, Trot, less than nothing. But, sooner than have him punished for his offences (as he would be if he prowled about in this country), I give him more money that I can afford, at intervals when he reappears, to go away. I was a fool when I married him; and I am so far an incurable fool on that subject, that, for the sake of what I once believed him to be, I wouldn't have even this shadow of my idle fancy hardly dealt with. For I was in earnest, Trot, if ever a woman was."

My aunt dismissed the matter with a heavy sigh, and smoothed her dress.

"There, my dear!" she said. "Now, you know the beginning, middle, and end, and all about it. We won't mention the subject to one another any more; neither, of course, will you mention it to anybody else. This is my grumpy, frumpy story, and we'll keep it to ourselves, Trot!"

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And when she buries him a little later on, her only words are: "He was a fine-looking man when I married him."

A REVERSE OF FORTUNE.

In the interval between David being articled to Mr Spenlow, and the incident about to be related, many things of first-rate importance had happened; the most important being that David discovers an old schoolfellow (Traddles) whose humour as a boy took the curious form of drawing skeletons whenever and wherever possible; that Little Emily elopes with Steerforth, bringing lamentation, ruin and shame on the happy household at Yarmouth, and David becomes engaged to Dora Spenlow.

He is entertaining Traddles at his rooms one evening and has set him a little way towards home. On returning he is surprised to find his aunt and Mr Dick (with kite complete) seated in his room. (Peggotty, now Mrs Barkis, is a widow and has been staying with him for some little time.)

"Trot," said my aunt at last, when she had finished her tea, and carefully smoothed down her dress, and wiped her lips—"you needn't go, Barkis!—Trot, have you got to be firm, and self-reliant?"

"I hope so, aunt."

"What do you think?" inquired Miss Betsey.

"I think so, aunt."

"Then why, my love," said my aunt, looking earnestly at me, "why do you think I prefer to sit upon this property of mine to-night?"

I shook my head, unable to guess.

"Because," said my aunt, "it's all I have. Because I'm ruined, my dear!"

If the house, and every one of us, had tumbled out into the river together, I could hardly have received a greater shock.

"Dick knows it," said my aunt, laying her hand calmly on my shoulder. "I am ruined, my dear Trot! All I

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have in the world is in this room, except the cottage; and that I have left Janet to let. Barkis, I want to get a bed for this gentleman to-night. To save expense, perhaps you can make up something here for myself. Anything will do. It's only for to-night. We'll talk about this, more, to-morrow."

I was roused from my amazement, and concern for her—I am sure, for her—by her falling on my neck for a moment, and crying that she only grieved for me. In another moment she suppressed this emotion; and said with an aspect more triumphant than dejected:

"We must meet reverses boldly, and not suffer them to frighten us, my dear. We must learn to act the play out. We must live misfortune down, Trot!"

Naturally such an aunt must be told of the engagement to Dora.

"And so you think you were formed for one another, and are to go through a party-supper-table kind of life, like two pretty pieces of confectionery, do you, Trot?"

She asked me this so kindly, and with such a gentle air, half playful and half sorrowful, that I was quite touched.

"We are young and inexperienced, aunt, I know," I replied; "and I dare say we say and think a good deal that is rather foolish. But we love one another truly, I am sure. If I thought Dora could ever love anybody else, or cease to love me; or that I could ever love anybody else, or cease to love her; I don't know what I should do—go out of my mind, I think!"

"Ah, Trot!" said my aunt, shaking her head, and smiling gravely, "blind, blind, blind!"

"Some one that I know, Trot," my aunt pursued, after a pause, "though of a very pliant disposition, has an earnestness of affection in him that reminds me of poor Baby. Earnestness is what that Somebody must look for, to sustain him and improve him, Trot. Deep, downright, faithful earnestness."

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"If you only knew the earnestness of Dora, aunt!" I cried.

"Oh, Trot!" she said again; "blind, blind!" and without knowing why, I felt a vague unhappy loss or want of something overshadow me like a cloud.

Unlike so affectionate an aunt to cast a damper over her boy's newly found happiness. But like many another elderly lady she has formed other views for David's future—has cherished other hopes. Hence, "blind, blind, blind."

A FAIRY TALE.

Now see how gallantly does this courageous lady bear the stinging blow that Dame Fortune administers to her—no less a blow than the loss of the whole of her income. She is relating the story of her losses to David and Agnes Wickfield, the latter being the daughter of her solicitor—who by this time has taken in as a partner his former office boy—Uriah Heep, who has managed to exercise an almost inexplicable influence over his wine-loving partner. In view of later developments this story of her losses told to Agnes is full of kindly consideration and has a pathetic charm that is all its own.

"Betsey Trotwood," said my aunt, who had always kept her money matters to herself: "—I don't mean your sister, Trot, my dear, but myself—had a certain property. It don't matter how much; enough to live on. More; for she had saved a little, and added to it. Betsey funded her property for some time, and then, by the advice of her man of business, laid it out on landed security. That did very well, and returned very good interest, until Betsey was paid off. I am talking of Betsey as if she was a man-of-war. Well! Then, Betsey had to look about her, for a new investment. She thought she was wiser, now, than her man of business, who was not such a good man of business by this time, as he used to be—I am alluding to

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your father, Agnes—and she took it into her head to lay it out for herself. So she took her pigs,” said my aunt, “to a foreign market; and a very bad market it turned out to be. First, she lost in the mining way, and then she lost in the diving way—fishing up treasure, or some such Tom Tiddler nonsense,” explained my aunt, rubbing her nose; “and then she lost in the mining way again, and, last of all, to set the thing entirely to rights, she lost in the banking way. I don’t know what the Bank shares were worth for a little while,” said my aunt; “cent per cent was the lowest of it, I believe; but the Bank was at the other end of the world, and tumbled into space, for what I know; anyhow, it fell to pieces, and never will and never can pay sixpence; and Betsey’s sixpences were all there, and there’s an end of them. Least said, soonest mended!”

Why is Agnes so relieved at this explanation? Her father is Miss Trotwood’s solicitor. Of late the wine-bibbing habit has been growing on him. The uncanny influence of Uriah Heep has been increasing. She has had a vague fear—but this account of the losses has reassured her.

ONE FOR URIAH

Miss Trotwood, though complacency itself to Mr Wickfield, has no room for his new partner, Uriah Heep. That gentleman and Mr Wickfield call at David’s chambers the day after the foregoing revelation is made; and Uriah, “a crawling impersonation of meanness,” is if possible a thought more obsequious, apologetic, fawning and servile than ever. He has just said something complimentary about Agnes.

He jerked himself about, after this compliment, in such an intolerable manner, that my aunt, who had sat looking straight at him, lost all patience.

“Deuce take the man!” said my aunt sternly, “what’s he about? Don’t be galvanic, sir!”

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"I ask your pardon, Miss Trotwood," returned Uriah; "I'm aware you're nervous."

"Go along with you, sir!" said my aunt, anything but appeased. "Don't presume to say so! I am nothing of the sort. If you're an eel, sir, conduct yourself like one. If you're a man, control your limbs, sir! Good God!" said my aunt, with great indignation, "I am not going to be serpentine and corkscrewed out of my senses!"

Mr Heep was rather abashed, as most people might have been, by this explosion; which derived great additional force from the indignant manner in which my aunt afterwards moved in her chair, and shook her head as if she were making snaps or bounces at him.

WORDS OF WISDOM.

More changes have taken place. Mr Micawber has gone to Canterbury to act as clerk to Wickfield & Heep; Mr Spenlow has died suddenly; and David has married Dora—to whom Betsy Trotwood is much attached, calling her "Little Blossom."

One day David asks his aunt whether she will advise and counsel Dora a little now and then.

"Trot," returned my aunt, with some emotion, "no! Don't ask me such a thing."

"These are early days, Trot," she pursued, "and Rome was not built in a day, nor in a year. You have chosen freely for yourself"; a cloud passed over her face for a moment, I thought; "and you have chosen a very pretty and a very affectionate creature. It will be your duty, and it will be your pleasure too—of course I know that; I am not delivering a lecture—to estimate her (as you chose her) by the qualities she has, and not by the qualities she may not have. The latter you must develop in her, if you can. And if you cannot, child," here my aunt rubbed her nose, "you must just accustom yourself to do without 'em. But remember, my dear, your future is

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between you two. No one can assist you; you are to work it out for yourselves. This is marriage, Trot; and Heaven bless you both in it, for a pair of babes in the wood as you are!"

RESTORATION OF PLUNDER.

Mr Micawber has evidently been utilising his time at Canterbury in the office of Wickfield & Heep to excellent advantage. It is so eminently human that so superlative a hypocrite and cunning a rascal as Uriah Heep should undervalue—if not entirely ignore—so superlatively a simple and transparent man as Micawber. But Micawber has made his discoveries, and one day we find Betsy Trotwood, David and Traddles all at the offices of Wickfield & Heep—with Uriah in attendance—listening while Micawber is unfolding the means by which Heep has gradually got Wickfield under his thumb. In particular he mentions one sum of "twelve, six, fourteen two and nine" with which Heep has illicitly dealt. This particularly interests Miss Trotwood.

What was my astonishment when I beheld my aunt, who had been profoundly quiet and attentive, make a dart at Uriah Heep, and seize him by the collar with both hands!

"You know what *I* want?" said my aunt.

"A strait-waistcoat," said he.

"No. My property!" returned my aunt. "Agnes, my dear, as long as I believed it had been really made away with by your father, I wouldn't—and my dear, I didn't even to Trot, as he knows—breathe a syllable of its having been placed here for investment. But, now I know this fellow's answerable for it, and I'll have it! Trot, come and take it way from him!"

Whether my aunt supposed, for the moment, that he kept her property in his neck-kerchief, I am sure I don't know; but she certainly pulled at it as if she thought so. I hastened to put myself between them, and to assure her

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that we would all take care that he should make the utmost restitution of everything he had wrongly got. This, and a few moments' reflection, pacified her; but she was not at all disconcerted by what she had done (though I cannot say as much for her bonnet), and resumed her seat composedly.

For the very great service he has done in rescuing her lost property (we can now see why she has told that Fairy Tale to Agnes—to reassure her) Miss Trotwood pays up Micawber's debts and assists him to go out to Australia, where he makes good.

AGNES AT LAST.

Dora, the child-wife of David, never strong, has died; and David, broken-hearted, has travelled abroad for three years. On his return he visits his aunt and makes enquiry after Agnes—who during his absence "might have been married twenty times"—but, adds Miss Trotwood: "I suspect she has an attachment"—and says no more; but sometime afterwards, just as David is starting out to ride to Canterbury, she says:

"I think Agnes is going to be married."

"God bless her!" said I, cheerfully.

"God bless her!" said my aunt, "and her husband too!"

I echoed it, parted from my aunt, went lightly downstairs, mounted, and rode away. There was greater reason than before to do what I had resolved to do.

Whether Betsy Trotwood intends her hint to act as a spur to David we can only guess; but it seems pretty obvious. At any rate, it does so and David proposes to Agnes and is accepted, Agnes accompanying her acceptance with the words "I have loved you all my life."

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A HAPPY ENDING.

It was nearly dinner-time next day when we appeared before my aunt. She was up in my study, Peggotty said : which it was her pride to keep in readiness and order for me. We found her, in her spectacles, sitting by the fire.

"Goodness me!" said my aunt, peering through the dusk, "who's this you're bringing home?"

"Agnes," said I.

As we had arranged to say nothing at first, my aunt was not a little discomfited. She darted a hopeful glance at me, when I said "Agnes"; but seeing that I looked as usual, she took off her spectacles in despair, and rubbed her nose with them.

She greeted Agnes heartily, nevertheless; and we were soon in the lighted parlour down-stairs, at dinner. My aunt put on her spectacles twice or thrice, to take another look at me, but as often took them off again, disappointed, and rubbed her nose with them. Much to the discomfiture of Mr Dick, who knew this to be a bad symptom.

"By the by, aunt," said I, after dinner; "I have been speaking to Agnes about what you told me."

"Then, Trot," said my aunt, turning scarlet, "you did wrong, and broke your promise."

"You are not angry, aunt, I trust? I am sure you won't be, when you learn that Agnes is not unhappy in any attachment."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said my aunt.

As my aunt appeared to be annoyed, I thought the best way was to cut her annoyance short. I took Agnes in my arm to the back of her chair, and we both leaned over her. My aunt with one clap of her hands, and one look through her spectacles, immediately went into hysterics, for the first and only time in all my knowledge of her.

The hysterics called up Peggotty. The moment my aunt was restored, she flew at Peggotty, and calling her a silly old creature, hugged her with all her might. After that, she hugged Mr Dick (who was highly honoured,

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but a good deal surprised); and after that, told them why. Then we were all happy together.

I could not discover whether my aunt, in her last short conversation with me, had fallen on a pious fraud, or had really mistaken the state of my mind. It was quite enough, she said, that she had told me Agnes was going to be married; and that I now knew better than anyone how true it was.

Now, in the full realisation of all her hopes for her boy's happiness could this splendid old lady have died happily.

Not that she did do so—nor, we hope, for many years afterwards; but at that moment Betsy Trotwood would have been content to sing her *Nunc Dimittis*. The boy who had come to her ragged, travel-stained and hungry, had done every credit to her fostering care and had reached fame and prosperity; and the darling wish of her inmost heart that he should marry her favourite, Agnes Wickfield, was about to be gratified. God bless all such women to whose starved hearts a little child opens the flood gates of affection; and God rest the soul of him, who by his unparalleled genius could create, out of such a gnarled and knotted piece of human material, so fine, so good, so true a woman.

XIII

DICKENS AND THE SOFTER SEX.

DICKENS AND THE SOFTER SEX.

No angry cries; no loud reproaches. Even her weeping and her sobs were stifled by her clinging round him. She only said, repeating it in agony of heart, How could he, could he, could he! And lost utterance in tears.

Oh, woman, God beloved in old Jerusalem! The best among us need deal lightly with thy faults, if only for the punishment thy nature will endure, in bearing heavy evidence against us, on the Day of Judgment!

"Wot does he mean by the soft sex, Sammy?" inquired Mr Weller, in a whisper.

"The womin," said Sam, in the same tone.

"He ain't far out there, Sammy," replied Mr Weller; "they must be a soft sex—a wery soft sex, indeed—if they let themselves be gammoned by such fellers as him."

These two passages, the one taken from *Martin Chuzzlewit* and the other from *Pickwick Papers*, may at first sight seem irreconcilable; but when considered it will be found that they are quite reconcilable and worthy of being placed side by side, for they show how deep was Dickens's regard for women—how infinite was his detestation of all who ill-treated them, or imposed upon their loving credulity.

The beautiful passage from *Martin Chuzzlewit* is to be found at the close of the chapter in which Jonas Chuzzlewit, having been dining and wining very freely with Montague Tigg, arrives home in a beastly state of intoxication and assaults his wife; and that within a short time of their honeymoon. Who was that wife? Mercy Pecksniff. The girl who had seen Jonas paying his attentions to her elder

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sister, Charity; had witnessed and encouraged the transfer of those affections to herself, and had permitted the brute to propose to her in the very presence of that justly indignant sister. True daughter of her hypocritical father, Mercy probably saw no incongruity in that proposal so made—gloried perhaps in her triumph. We can imagine the sort of contempt which Dickens would have for such a girl; and though he was an indulgent parent to all his literary children, the chastisement he awarded to Mercy was both severe and deserved.

Yet in the very act of recording the crowning act of her degradation—personal brutality from her newly made husband—Dickens gives us that beautifully lofty thought—that by her very nature, the necessity for giving evidence against man's treatment of her on that Great Day when truth must be told, will be women's heavy punishment. A greater tribute to the loving tenderness of the heart of woman could not well be paid—nor could a better paragraph be found in the whole of his writings to illustrate Dickens's high regard for womankind.

The paragraph from *Pickwick Papers* is from that amusing chapter which gives the report of the visit of the two Wellers to the monthly meeting of the Brick Lane Branch of the United Grand Junction Ebenezer Temperance Association. The meeting was being asked to join in the singing of "The Jolly Young Waterman" to the tune of the "Old Hundredth," and the chairman as a preliminary to the singing was explaining that this song had been written by Mr Dibdin to show the advantages of abstinence. In that allocution he used the observation "the soft sex"; and hence Mr Tony Weller's query.

For Shepherds, Stiggins's, Chadbands and Melchisedek Howlers, Dickens had no patience and gave them scant quarter. All such evil practitioners as these find credulous women as their dupes, on whom they prey without mercy and without ruth, and it was with as little mercy and ruth that Dickens held them up to the pitiless indignation of the public. Weller senior in his remark above quoted seems to

be blaming the women themselves—but the sting of his speech is in the word “gammoned by *such fellers as him*”—“him” meaning Mr Anthony Humm, the worthy follower of the Shepperd and Stiggins.

OTHER TIMES—OTHER MANNERS.

There are not wanting people who say that Dickens never understood women. To those I commend a reperusal of his works. It would indeed be strange if a man who created five hundred women characters had failed all the time to hold a mirror up to nature. The fact is that such critics do not take the trouble to realise how conditions of life differed, in Dickens's day, from those of to-day. These same critics urge in justification for their condemnation that so many of his girl characters are colourless stay-at-homes. At first blush that seems an accurate statement.

A GENERAL SURVEY.

I will briefly run through a few of his girl characters :

Kate Nickleby is a patient, loving daughter; Madeline Bray (*Nicholas Nickleby*) is willing to sell herself to the hideous miser, Gride, if only her father can be released from his monetary troubles; Dolly Varden (*Barnaby Rudge*, 1841) has always been a great favourite; a charming little flirt, who gave her name to a bonnet much worn in the 'seventies. But she is quite domesticated, and, in my view, overshadowed by her mother's servant, Miggs, who has set her maiden fancies on that huge joke, Simon (“Simmun,” as she calls him) Tappertit. Mary Graham, the heroine of *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843) is a rather vague and shadowy sketch. But we know that she is constant in her devotion to her benefactor, Old Martin, and true in her love for young Martin. What more was asked of girls in those days? Florence Dombey (*Dealings with the Firm of Dombey & Son, Wholesale, Retail and for Exportation*—1848) is a very dutiful daughter and loving sister; but here again, the maid, Susan Nipper,

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is the more attractive—because more human—character. Edith Dombey is to me, frankly, an impossibility. That a beautiful woman should give herself to a wealthy man, just for his wealth, and without any love for him, is an everyday event; but that she should elope with a man she hates, just in order to punish her husband's pride, maintaining her wifely integrity, but giving herself every appearance of having broken the Seventh Commandment, seems a madness of which a proud woman like Edith would hardly be guilty.

Much more true to life is the picture of the middle-aged, patient spinster, Lucretia Tox; who pours out all the wealth of her middle-aged affections on the stiff-necked Dombey; secretly encouraged thereto by Dombey's sister, Mrs Chick; and heartily rated therefor by that same lady, when Dombey's marriage with Edith is arranged.

Esther Summerson (*Bleak House*—1852) is—or should be—the principle character in that somewhat gloomy, but amazing novel; amazing because of its vast array of characters, and its wondrous insight into human nature. She suffers a little, however (like David Copperfield), from telling her story in the first person. She is highly domesticated, makes Mr Jarndyce a model housekeeper, and would have married him from her keen sense of duty and her real affection for him, had he not seen that her love was given elsewhere. Lady Dedlock is a great character; but greater far in her downfall, in the degradation of her pitiful death at the gates of the noisesome burial-ground where the lover of her youth—father of Esther—lies buried, than in her glory as a beautiful society leader.

In Amy Dorrit (*Little Dorrit*—1857) we have a further example of the loving, devoted daughter; sacrificing her youth to the service of a selfish father, sister and brother. The beauty of her character lies in this: that in riches, as in poverty, she is ever the same. It has been said of her that she is a humdrum creature. Very well! If virtue, constancy, devotion, sacrifice and utter unselfishness are humdrum, let us have more Amy Dorrits. So shall the earth be better and heaven the fuller.

The woman characters in the unfinished *Mystery of Edwin Drood* are highly diversified. We have quite another variety of boarding-house keeper in Mrs Billickin; a saner, wiser—but not more charming—Dora in Rosa Bud; two delightful “Dresden Shepherdesses” in Mrs Crisparkle and Miss Twinkleton; a really grand character in Helena Landless; and a perfect picture of repulsive old age in the opium-den hag. Indeed there is not a character in this unfinished work that does not bear every evidence of careful and loving study—and that from the pen of a man broken in health, worn by suffering and exhausted by hard work.

RUTH PINCH.

There are one or two women characters, to whom a more detailed mention should be given, and of these I give pride of place to bewitching Ruth Pinch. So captivating is she that we rather envy Tom Pinch the possession of such a sister. And it must not be forgotten that it is through her instrumentality that we are introduced to that bonny butcher—a really bonny butcher—when she and Tom go to buy the meat for the celebrated meat-pudding, the deft making of which proves so attractive to John Westlock.

To see the butcher slap the steak, before he laid it on the block, and give his knife a sharpening, was to forget breakfast instantly. It was agreeable, too—it really was—to see him cut it off, so smooth and juicy. There was nothing savage in the act, although the knife was large and keen; it was a piece of art, high art; there was delicacy of touch, clearness of tone, skilful handling of the subject, fine shading. It was the triumph of mind over matter; quite.

Perhaps the greenest cabbage-leaf ever grown in a garden was wrapped about this steak, before it was delivered over to Tom. But the butcher had a sentiment for his business, and knew how to refine upon it. When he saw Tom putting the cabbage-leaf into his pocket awkwardly,

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he begged to be allowed to do it for him; "for meat," he said with some emotion, "must be humoured, not drove."

Is meat wrapped up in cabbage-leaves to-day, and are there any such enthusiastic butchers left? I wonder!

The picture of Ruth is one of exquisite daintiness; and the story of her courtship by John Westlock a charming idyll. What better rendezvous in grimy old London for such a pair of lovers than the Temple Fountain? I was much amused—also much touched—one day when walking through the Temple, at being accosted by a gentleman who said, with that careful diction so characteristic of educated Americans: "Sir, would you kindly direct me to the location of Ruth Pinch's Fountain?" Asked as naturally as if he were wishing to be directed to St. Paul's or Charing Cross; and with never a shadow of doubt but that I, as a Londoner, must naturally know the answer to such a question. Fortunately I did; and I not only *told* him where the Fountain was—but *took* him there. His knowledge of Dickens's books was encyclopædic, and his answer to my question as to which was his favourite was most emphatic: "*Martin Chuzzlewit* all the time." I was glad and said so.

LITTLE NELL.

The love that Dickens bore for children was as remarkable as his understanding of, and sympathy with them, was astounding. In an address delivered at Clifford's Inn Hall—that ancient, cobble-stoned inn just off Fleet Street—to the members of the Dickens Fellowship in 1911—his daughter Kate (Mrs Perugini) said:

My father, perhaps more than any other writer of his day, had that sympathy with children that made their appearance in his books a necessity, for, like some other very great men, the child he had been, never really slept for long, but awoke often and spoke eagerly and spontaneously, as children will, telling him of the sad and

broken lives of his poorer little brothers and sisters who are for ever present in this great London, and who wait long and patiently sometimes for us to turn ad help them. My father listened to the urgent voice, and did his utmost, and never does his eloquence more deeply move us than when he employs it in order that we may understand their suffering and endeavour to relieve the misery of their lot.

Oliver Twist and *Nicholas Nickleby* were written when he was a young man, but even at that early period of his career his mind was full of righteous indignation for the cause of poor children condemned to the starvation methods of Mr Bumble, or the still more degrading lives to which they were subjected by Mr Squeers. From the time those two stories were written he never neglected an opportunity of speaking or writing for the frail young lives so dependent upon our care. But, apart from the innate desire to fight for the oppressed, which was one of his finest qualities, he always had a great tenderness for whatever was appealing, quaint, or beautiful in all children, and fully appreciated any little oddity of character that may have seemed to others, perhaps, a trifle incongruous.

I know from a careful and sympathetic study of his works that nobody knew better the heart of a child than Dickens; I know that on Paul Dombey, Pip, David Copperfield, and Little Nell, particularly the latter, he showered the fountains of an overflowing affection. I know that Hood wrote an essay on her, earnest, eloquent and tenderly appreciative; that Lord Jeffrey, stern and unemotional judge and editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, paid her the tribute of his tears; that even Landor praised her, likening her to Juliet and Desdemona; above all, I know that to the world in general she was an immense favourite; and so real a being, that Dickens was inundated with appeals not to let her die. One of my earliest recollections is a song my mother used to sing to me "between the dusk and the daylight," when we children were waiting to say good-night to daddy, a song

SOME DICKENS WOMEN

founded on Little Nell's death; a song which I verily believe was sung for a generation in nearly every British home. I think the words of the opening verse are well worth recalling :

They told him gently she was gone,
And spoke of Heav'n and smil'd;
They drew him from the lonely room,
Where lay the lovely child.
'Twas all in vain, he heeded not
Their pitying looks of sorrow;
"Hush! Hush!" he said, "She only sleeps,
She'll wake again to-morrow."

No greater tribute to the universal popularity of a fictional creation was ever paid to author than that genuine and touching tribute of Bret Harte, "Dickens in Camp." I can never read that without an almost reverent wonder at the power of one man, who could make the women of England weep, and, reaching across an ocean and the width of a vast continent, draw tears from the eyes of the rough miners of the Sierra Nevada.

If we are tempted sometimes to find her a bit trying—a little precocious for a child of fourteen, let us think of her as a girl *Oliver Twist*, so innately pure that nothing impure or coarse can affect her. Let us look upon her as her stupid old grandfather's guardian angel—an attendant spirit of good waging constant warfare against the spirit of evil which tempted him to the gambling that obsessed him. Above all, let us remember that to countless thousands of our countrymen and countrywomen, long since dead, she was a living reality, revered as no other little heroine in fiction has ever been revered, for her pure, unselfish love.

MRS JARLEY.

What delights do we not owe to Mrs Jarley? In how many village halls, concert halls, town halls, and country

houses have "Mrs Jarley's Wax-Works" proved an ever-popular and ever-hilarious production? She is only a casual incident in the story—a passing benefactress of Little Nell, but directly we are introduced to her she stands out from the pages, a real figure of flesh and blood, and, despite her professional rhodomontade, a woman full of tender sympathy. Her handbills—some purporting to be dialogues between the Emperor of China and an Oyster, or the Archbishop of Canterbury and a dissenter—all pointing the moral that a visit to Jarley's is an urgent necessity—endear her to us, and when we read her ludicrous descriptions of her models and the equally ludicrous morals she draws, we positively love her.

"That," said Mrs Jarley, "is an unfortunate Maid of Honour in the Time of Queen Elizabeth, who died from pricking her finger in consequence of working upon a Sunday. Observe the blood which is trickling from her finger; also the gold-eyed needle of the period, with which she is at work.

"That, ladies and gentlemen, is Jasper Packlemerton of atrocious memory, who courted and married fourteen wives, and destroyed them all, by tickling the soles of their feet when they were sleeping in the consciousness of innocence and virtue. On being brought to the scaffold and asked if he was sorry for what he had done, he replied yes, he was sorry for having let 'em off so easy, and hoped all Christian husbands would pardon him the offence. Let this be a warning to all young ladies to be particular in the character of the gentlemen of their choice. Observe that his fingers are curled as if in the act of tickling, and that his face is represented with a wink, as he appeared when committing his barbarous murders."

Mrs RADDLE.

Where did Dickens gain his experience of his landladies—so varied—and all so human? Mrs Billickin, who regards

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her boarders as mortal enemies; Mrs Todgers, whose mind is weakened by the cares of gravity; Mrs Lirriper, honest, hard-working, kindly and generous; and Mrs Raddle!—the fierce little woman whom Bob Sawyer honoured with his patronage—but not with his money. Chesterton says of one of Dickens's minor characters—I forget which—that not one of us could have invented him; or, if we had, we should have so exhausted ourselves, that for ever after we should have had to be wheeled about in a Bath Chair. Agreed! with this proviso: that to have only thought out the following interview, would have meant subsequent hopeless lunacy.

Our first glimpse of Mrs Raddle is when Bob Sawyer is about to entertain Mr Pickwick and his friends in his apartments, and is bemoaning to his friend, Ben Allen, his bad luck that at such a time Mrs Raddle should be worrying him about his "little bill." While thus talking there is a rap at the door and Bob, with a look of abject apprehension, says "Come in."

The permission was not at all necessary, for, before Mr Bob Sawyer had uttered the words, a little, fierce woman bounced into the room, all in a tremble with passion, and pale with rage.

"Now, Mr Sawyer," said the little, fierce woman, trying to appear very calm, "if you'll have the kindness to settle that little bill of mine I'll thank you, because I've got my rent to pay this afternoon, and my landlord's a-waiting below now." Here the little woman rubbed her hands, and looked steadily over Mr Bob Sawyer's head, at the wall behind him.

"I am very sorry to put you to any inconvenience, Mrs Raddle," said Bob Sawyer deferentially, "but——"

"Oh, if isn't any inconvenience," replied the little woman, with a shrill titter. "I didn't want it particular before to-day; leastways, as it has to go to my landlord directly, it was as well for you to keep it as me. You promised me this afternoon, Mr Sawyer, and every gentle-

DICKENS AND THE SOFTER SEX

man as has ever lived here, has kept his word, sir, as of course anybody as calls himself a gentleman does." Mrs Raddle tossed her head, bit her lips, rubbed her hands harder, and looked at the wall more steadily than ever. It was plain to see, as Mr Bob Sawyer remarked in a style of Eastern allegory on a subsequent occasion, that she was "getting the steam up."

"I am very sorry, Mrs Raddle," said Bob Sawyer, with all imaginable humility, "but the fact is, that I have been disappointed in the city to-day."—Extraordinary place that city. An astonishing number of men always *are* getting disappointed there.

"Well, Mr Sawyer," said Mrs Raddle, planting herself firmly on a purple cauliflower in the Kidderminster carpet, "and what's that to me, sir?"

"I—I—have no doubt, Mrs Raddle," said Bob Sawyer, blinking this last question, "that before the middle of next week we shall be able to set ourselves quite square, and go on, on a better system, afterwards."

This was all Mrs Raddle wanted. She had bustled up to the apartment of the unlucky Bob Sawyer, so bent upon going into a passion, that, in all probability, payment would have rather disappointed her than otherwise. She was in excellent order for a little relaxation of the kind, having just exchanged a few introductory compliments with Mr R. in the front kitchen.

"Do you suppose, Mr Sawyer," said Mrs Raddle, elevating her voice for the information of the neighbours, "do you suppose that I'm a-going day after day to let a fellar occupy my lodgings as never thinks of paying his rent, nor even the very money laid out for the fresh butter and lump sugar that's bought for his breakfast, and the very milk that's took in, at the street door? Do you suppose a hard-working and industrious woman as has lived in this street for twenty year (ten year over the way, and nine year and three quarters in this very house) has nothing else to do but to work herself to death after a parcel of lazy idle fellars, that are always smoking and

SOME DICKENS WOMEN

drinking, and lounging, when they ought to be glad to turn their hands to anything that would help 'em to pay their bills? Do you——"

MRS TONY WELLER.

Of Mrs Susan Weller, proprietress of the Marquis of Granby, Dorking, *and* wife of Mr Tony Weller, Sam's father, it is not necessary to say much. She is the means of introducing us to the Rev. Mr Stiggins and the Shepherd—and that is in itself sufficient for immortalisation. She is, too, happy in her death, for it is that event which produces the following effusion—the combined effort of her husband, who could not write, and a friend who could; the mixture of pronouns making this letter a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.

" MARKIS GRAN

" BY DORKEN

" *Wensdy.*

" MY DEAR SAMMLE,

" I am werry sorry to have the pleasure of being a Bear of ill news your Mother in law cort cold consekens of imprudently settin too long on the damp grass in the rain a hearing of a shepherd who warnt able to leave off till late at night owen to his havin vound his-self up vith brandy and vater and not being able to stop his-self till he got a little sober which took a many hours to do the doctor says that if she'd svallo'd varm brandy and vater arterwards insted of afore she mightn't have been no vus her veels was immedety greased and everythink done to set her agoin as could be inwented your father had hopes as she vould have vorked round as usual but just as she was a turnen the corner my boy she took the wrong road and vent down hill vith a welocity you never see and notwithstanding that the drag wos put on directly by the medikel man it wornt of no use at all for she paid the last pike at twenty minutes afore six o'clock yesterday evenin havin done the jouney wery much under the reglar

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time vich praps was partly owen to her haven taken in wery little luggage by the vay your father says that if you vill come and see me Sammy he vil take it as a wery great favor for I am wery lonely Samivel n b he *vill* have it spelt that vay vich I say ant right and as there is sich a many things to settle he is sure your guvner wont object of course he vill not Sammy for I knows him better so he sends his dooty in which I join and am Samivel infernally yours

"TONY VELLER."

Sam very properly at first describes this as "a incomprehensible letter . . . with all this he-ing and I-ing." He knows it is not his father's writing, because that gentleman can only print in capital letters, but at last light comes to him, at a hint from Mary the housemaid. "The gen'l'm'n as wrote it was a tellin' all about the misfortune in a proper vay, and then my father comes a lookin' over him and complicates the whole concern by puttin' his oar in." Wonderful Sam! Marvellous Mary!

It cannot be doubted that in his delineation of such characters as Mrs Raddle, Mrs Bardell, Nancy, Mrs Nickleby, Mrs Varden, Miggs, Mrs Gamp, Betsy Prig, Mrs Pipchin, Susan Nipper, Mrs Crupp, Betsy Trotwood, Mrs Sparsit, Madame Defarge, Mrs Wilfer, and Mrs Lirriper, Dickens gave us more real flesh and blood creations than he did in his delineation of the filial, dutiful, stay-at-home early Victorian young lady. Yet, despite that, what successful novelist of to-day would not give his very eyes to be able to create a Kate Nickleby—a Dolly Varden—an Arabella Allen—a Florence Dombey—a Dora Spenlow—an Agnes Wickfield—an Esther Summerson—a Louisa Bounderby—a Little Dorrit—a Lucie Manette or a Bella Wilfer—to say nothing of a Little Nell? These were names that were living realities to thousands that have passed away; they are living realities to the many thousands who to-day can recall a living Charles Dickens, and I dare to prophesy will be living realities to countless thousands yet unborn.

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